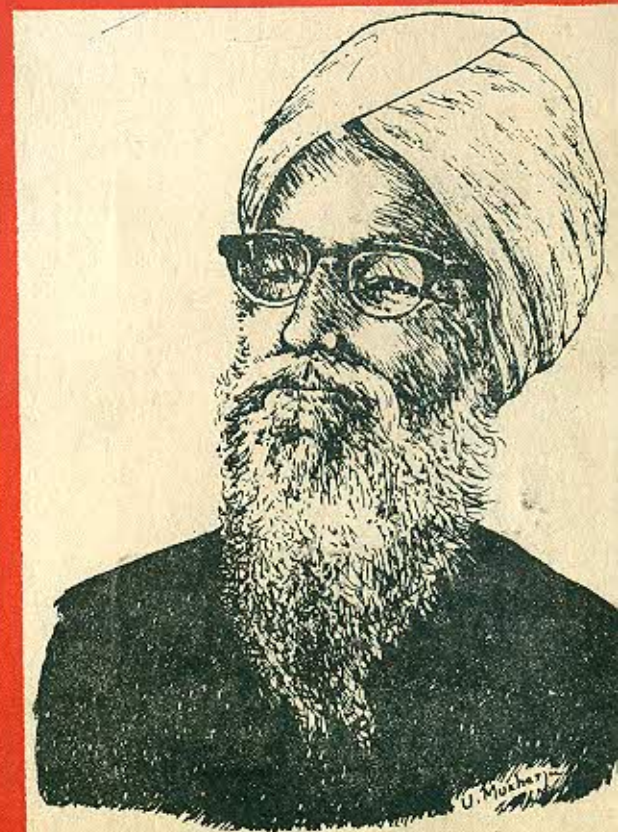




Nanak Singh

Sant Singh Sekhon



*Makers of
Indian
Literature*

SAHITYA AKADEMI
REVISED PRICE Rs. 15-00

NANAK SINGH (1897-1971), hailed as the father of modern Punjabi novel, is in the line of Bankimchandra and Saratchandra in Bengali and Premchand in Hindi. He gave a new turn to Punjabi short story, investing it with pace, grace and finesse. Romantic love and social criticism are the recurring themes in his writings. He exposes religious hypocrisy, caste tyranny and oppression of women. Gandhian idealism pervades his fiction. Author of thirty-five novels, his Sahitya Akademi Award-winning novel, **Ik Miyan Do Talwaran**, has been hailed as an outstanding contribution to Punjabi literature for the depth of treatment and realistic characterisation.

SANT SINGH SEKHON (b. 1908), is a distinguished writer, critic and playwright. His play **Mittar-Pyara** won for him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1972. In this monograph, he evaluates the life and work of Nanak Singh mainly for the benefit of the non-Punjabi reader.

NANAK SINGH

Makers of Indian Literature

NANAK SINGH

SANT SINGH SEKHON

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

From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A D.

Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi.



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1

Birth and Early Years

Nanak Singh was born on July 4, 1897, at village Chak Hamid in Jhelum District, now in Pakistan. His father Bahadur Chand Suri had gone to Peshawar to earn his livelihood as a shopkeeper, leaving behind in the village his wife Lachhmi who bore him three children there. Nanak Singh was the eldest child and was named Hans Raj.

As Nanak Singh writes, "Once or twice a year my father visited the village and after a stay of a week or ten days and making over a part of his earnings to my mother, returned to his place of business. Every time when departing he would promise to take her with him to Peshawar the next time. The poor woman passed ten years waiting for that next time which was again and again postponed."

Hans Raj's father had his shop in the Cantonment Bazaar of Peshawar where people flocked from all sides, from Pothohar, Doaba, Multan and Marwar to do profitable shopkeeping under the patronage of army officers and men. In earlier days these people did not like to bring their wives and children to the cantonment but gradually this constraint disappeared. So, after waiting and yearning for long years, Lachhmi had the good luck to step on that land about which she had ever been regaled with words like "grapes and melons are as abundant there as radishes and carrots here." But good luck soon forsook the poor

woman with three children on her hands and the fourth in her womb. "It was the second lunar part of the month of Paus," Nanak Singh recollects sadly, "There was frost on all sides. The mother of three was undergoing the throes of birth of the fourth. Her husband who had two days earlier gone with the pier of a man to the cremation ground and returned with pneumonia, lay on a cot beside her. In the third quarter of the night a son was born, and in the fourth quarter the father breathed his last."

After her husband's death the hapless widow, mother of three boys and a daughter, the eldest not having yet crossed his tenth year, entrusted the management of the shop to the brothers of her deceased husband, who did not take long to put the shop in desperate straits.

But Hans Raj's mother did not lose heart. She sold her jewellery to buy merchandise needed for the shop. Under her wise guidance, Hans Raj and his younger brother both in their early teens, were able to keep the family concern going.

Nanak Singh refers here to a painful incident in his mother's life. To escape defilement by a brute of a man, whose name Nanak Singh hates to bring on the tip of his tongue or even pen, she jumped from the first floor window to the ground floor, fracturing both her legs below the knees. "Not for one or two, but for many years my dear mother lay in bed for this attempt to save her honour from the brutal outrage. If this world has given me hearty regard, a gentle wife, and considerate and obedient children, I fully believe it is owing to the blessings of my mother on whom I attended day and night, so far indeed as to clean her excrements with my own hands," writes Nanak Singh. In the same context he tells that he had received formal schooling for only five years.

Nanak Singh recollects his first love. He calls his beloved by the name of Savitri, though he vouches only for the fact that her name began with S. "Though I had been a playmate of that girl from childhood," he writes, "it had never entered my dreams that with the lapse of time she would sink deep into my life. . . . She may have been a year or two older than I, I think, but intellectually and morally she could be the grandmother of my grandmother. In comparison, I felt myself entirely a churl. There was another difference, too. She was as comely as I was ugly.

But for all these differences, Savitri had affection and love for me."

Savitri had lost her mother early in life and was under the care of her father and his widowed sister. This aunt avenged her widow's misfortune on her poor niece. She was capricious, superstitious, irritable and cruel. For all the domestic drudgery that Savitri performed, her aunt rewarded her with abuses and beatings. But to an outsider she was of a highly devotional bent of mind. Savitri's father was afraid of his sister, though he loved Savitri dearly.

Savitri was also widowed in early youth, and the only time Hans Raj did not like her looks was when she had parted with her plaited pigtail as the mark of a widow's sorrow. But as her hair grew, Hans Raj's interest in her grew all the more. It developed into an attraction. "Many times a day I went to Savitri's house, mostly to see how long her hair had grown." When he did not find the growth quite visible from one day to the next, he was much dismayed and Savitri chided him for his impatience. When she told him that it would take more than six months to regain its full size, he was visibly disappointed. But a greater disappointment lay in store for him. Savitri suffered from tuberculosis. While taking her, on medical advice, to a hill station, her father asked Hans Raj's mother her permission to allow him to accompany them. Nanak Singh is all praise for his mother for having allowed him without demur to go with them. "Rarely would a mother," he says, "put her child in danger for the sake of another's child."

Savitri did not live long. On her death-bed, she asked Hans Raj's permission to speak out her mind. He gave it and was all ears, but before she could speak she was seized with a convulsion, vomitted blood and was no more. "The sentence that had remained unfinished—a greater disappointment than her death—haunted my mind for many years to follow." Nanak Singh calls this the first and the last romance in his life.

After Savitri's death, Nanak Singh writes, "only one thing was left to help me forget my grief for a little while and this was my devotion to music and poetry, which was also a memento that Savitri had given me. "In those days poetry meant just composing verses to recite or sing in public gatherings or among groups of friends. I became so attached to versifying that I

would frame verses, however indifferently, on every occasion that offered. Whatever I observed or felt about, I reproduced in the form of verse. Sometimes sitting among friends I would compose verses *extempore*."

This made Hans Raj very popular, but he began to contract bad habits. The very first of these habits in Nanak Singh's judgement was that of smoking and he went to far as to become almost a chain-smoker. This led to drinking and then to stealing, but his pilferage was confined only to the shop of one of his uncles. Perhaps the desire for revenge was a contributory factor in this.

Nanak Singh complains bitterly of how his uncles had done him and his brothers out of the stock left to them at the time of their father's death. But one of the two uncles was to pay dearly for it. As fate would have it, three sons were born to this uncle, one after another, but all the three died in their infancy. He was without help in the shop which was next to that of Hans Raj's. Whenever this uncle had to go out for a while on some errand he would ask Hans Raj or his younger brother, who ever happened to be available, to keep an eye on his shop. His uncle was not particularly careful about the cash in his safe which was always without a lock. "As soon as my uncle's back was turned," Nanak Singh writes, "I leapt like a monkey over his safe and took a handful of the cash. This continued for over a year, but my uncle didn't have the faintest suspicion. And indeed even my brother did not know of it till the end."

It seems Hans Raj was retrieved out of this mire by quite a fortuitous circumstance. He writes, "It was the night of *Lohri* festival (the 12th of January). In the sitting-room of a wastrel of a friend who was a bachelor and employed as a clerk in the Commissariate, an orgy of drinking and reciting verses (*baits*) was on, when suddenly an elderly man came in on some business he happened to have with our host." This was Gyani Bagh Singh, the priest of the Gurudwara of the local Singh Sabha which was situated in the same market as Hans Raj's shop. "How our attachment began I do not remember," writes Nanak Singh, "But I can vouchsafe this much that the link between us was the harmonium on which I practised the tunes I learnt and the songs I wrote. These songs I used sometimes to sing to him."

Nothing passed between Gyani Bagh Singh and Hans Raj on that occasion. But Hans Raj left going to the Gurudwara which he used to frequent before to listen to the *Sukhmani* recited there by one Bhai Pratap Singh who was the head-porter at the Peshawar railway station. One day as Hans Raj was returning to his shop after a walk in the park behind the Gurudwara he came face to face with Gyani Bagh Singh. The Gyani greeted Hans Raj which showed the Gyani's extreme civility, as Nanak Singh rightly recalls. "How is it you have not been seen at the Gurudwara for many days now? Have you been out of Peshawar for some time?" From there to the market the two walked together and when Hans Raj turned towards his shop, the Gyani asked him if he would visit the Gurudwara next morning.

When Hans Raj went to the Gurudwara the next morning, Gyani Bagh Singh invited him over to his room which utterly demoralised Hans Raj and frightened him as to what might come next. Gyani Bagh Singh did not make any reference to the earlier meeting, but talked of other things. When they parted, the Gyani said, "So far as I know, you take keen interest in the music at the Gurudwara and have also some talent in writing verses. Why don't you organise a choir of your own? I think it will be a great success." Hans Raj said, "Gyaniji, you know everything and yet shut your eyes to my sins. How can you hope for such a thing from a sinner like me?" The Gyani pressed Hans Raj's head to his bosom and said, "The Guru has great power to redeem. You need not be so disheartened."

And the next day, the Gyani collected some half a dozen sons of the shopkeepers of the market, and said to them, "Look, young men, from now on Lalaji (Hans Raj) will teach you to sing the hymns of the Gurus. I make a prophecy that in this year's *gurupurva* music, your band will be the best." Needless to say, the prophecy came true. Not once, however, did the Gyani ask Hans Raj to give up his old ways and turn over a new leaf. But the same year Hans Raj entered the Sikh fold and became Nanak Singh. He was then eighteen. Searching for the causes of this change in his life, Nanak Singh observes with great humility, "When I look at it closely, I find many reasons for it, other than Gyani Bagh Singh's treatment of me. And one particular reason was my hunger for fame. Or perhaps, in those days I was

much under the influence of the late Gyani Sher Singh, who was then preaching vigorously at Peshawar, and conducted lively debates with the preachers of the Arya Samaj which often turned violent. Gyani Sher Singh would frequently ask me to become a Sikh, as a consequence of which I was, on the other hand, considerably disillusioned with him, my redeemer. This disillusionment is a different story which I have narrated in some detail in the introduction of my novel, *Pujari* (The Priest)."

Nanak Singh says he learnt and gained a good deal at Gyani Bagh Singh's feet, but the lasting impression it made on him was during the world-wide epidemic of influenza that broke out in 1918, at the conclusion of the First World War. People died like flies everywhere but more than anywhere else, according to Nanak Singh, in Peshawar. Out of a band of about forty, organised by Gyani Bagh Singh to look after the sick and to cremate the dead, only some fifteen survived. Nanak Singh was one of those fortunates.

This Gyani Bagh Singh is the Siddh Baba of the novel *Adh Khir ia Phul* (The Half-blown Flower). In some other novels of his also this Siddh Baba has come before his readers. "Indeed," Nanak Singh says, "I have no hesitation in saying that a part of this my Baba or whatever you like to call him, is found in every work of mine."

Another incident connected with this Siddh Baba or Gyani Bagh Singh narrated by Nanak Singh will bear mention here. About 1920-21, in the days of the Sikh Gurudwara Reform Movement (Nanak Singh does not give the date in his narrative), great tension came to prevail between Hindus and Sikhs at Rawalpindi, Peshawar and in other towns of West Panjab. Late one evening, at about midnight, Nanak Singh and some of his companions beat up and seriously wounded a Hindu youth who had come from outside and asked them the way to the place of his destination. Later, they threw him, all unconscious and bleeding, at a secluded place. But somehow he was picked up and brought to Gyani Bagh Singh. The Gyani sent for Nanak Singh and asked him to fetch a doctor to treat the injuries of the young man. Nanak Singh saw tears in Gyani Bagh Singh's eyes and was so filled with remorse that, he says, he would have loved to be upbraided and even beaten by the Gyani for his misdeed.

2

Groping Towards a Career

After his mother's death at about this time, Nanak Singh was so alienated from the world that he began to think of becoming a recluse. Gyani Bagh Singh got him to promise to wait for a year, and managed to bring a proposal of marriage for his young disciple. Nanak Singh, however, did not agree, but remarks that the Gyani did not show the least resentment at his refusal.

Nanak Singh had given up shopkeeping, too, at this juncture, but he needed some work to keep him "moored to the world." Gyani Bagh Singh managed this also and sent him to Rawalpindi to work in a printing press that Gyani Sher Singh had newly started. Nanak Singh spent about a year and a half there until the press was shifted to Amritsar with a change in the ownership. However, this period also had not brought peace of mind to Nanak Singh or reconciled him to the world.

The shifting of the press to Amritsar and the consequent loss of his job, gave Nanak Singh another opportunity to nurse his desire to become a recluse. He had come to know of a Nirmala Sadhu of Amritsar who was then on a visit to Rawalpindi and read holy texts at a Gurudwara. He was now at Amritsar and Nanak Singh thought of joining him there. But at Amritsar Nanak Singh found this Sadhu to be quite the reverse of what he had thought him to be. In consequence Nanak Singh

was filled with disgust for all Sadhus and persons of holy pretensions. He left the Sadhu's premises and found through the kindness of a Brahmin priest a room in the upper story of what was known as Peshwarian da Gurudwara and also Kashinath's temple.

Nanak Singh writes that at this time, however hard he tried, he could not turn his mind to meditation and prayer. Gone were the days when he was wont in the bitter cold of December and January to wake up at three in the morning, take his bath and make himself busy in meditation and prayer for hours together. Now he remained in bed up to ten in the morning, and felt the life in him pouring out moment by moment.

But at this juncture the songs expressing devotion to the Gurus and exhorting the Sikhs to join the struggle for the purification of the Gurudwaras from the depravity of the priests whose interests the British Government supported, came to his rescue. These he had written for Savitri while at Peshawar. He had already brought out three editions of this song-book, *Satguru Mahima*, at Peshawar and one edition at Rawalpindi, adding a few more songs in every new edition. The first edition was priced one pice, the second at an anna (four pice), the third at two annas and the fourth at three annas. Now at Amritsar he brought out a larger fifth edition priced at four annas. The first print of 2,000 copies was bought at once by the local booksellers. This success led Bhai Kirpal Singh, a bookseller of Amritsar, to invite Nanak Singh to become his partner in a new firm, by the name of Nanak Singh Kirpal Singh. But again Nanak Singh's averseness to business obliged him to dissolve the partnership after just about a year, though it had brought him a net profit of over a thousand and eight hundred rupees.

In 1922, Nanak Singh was advised by his erstwhile partner to sell outright the copyright of the booklet for a thousand rupees, which on the advice again of Gyani Bagh Singh, Nanak Singh forbore to do. Nanak Singh wrote in 1959 that he had earned twenty thousand rupees as royalty out of it by then and every year it fetched him about five hundred rupees.

Nanak Singh had gone to Gyani Bagh Singh not to consult him about selling the copyright of *Satguru Mahima*, but to seek his advice about his mental unrest. The Gyani advised him to go to jail in the Akali movement. Nanak Singh was taken

aback, but decided nevertheless to act on this advice.

He made for Amritsar and after five or six days joined a batch of Akali Satyagrahis to Guru ka Bagh. He was sent to Borstal Jail, Lahore, where already about 2,000 Akalis were lodged and more were coming every day.

While in prison, Nanak Singh found an opportunity to search for peace within himself, and not seek it outside. He went deeper and deeper into his inner self and regained his old capacity for meditation.

Here he met a redeemer, one Jagan Nath, a special-class prisoner who was suffering from tuberculosis. Jagan Nath was allowed to receive from outside and read only novels and short-story collections of Hindi and Bengali. The greater part of these books were by Munshi Prem Chand. Nanak Singh sometimes read these books from him. Reading Munshi Prem Chand, Nanak Singh says, brought a new turn in his life, showed him a new path. He resolved to become, like Munshi Prem Chand, a writer with a special purpose. In a couple of months Nanak Singh wrote like most beginners, an autobiographical novel in which Savitri, Gyani Bagh Singh, the Nirmala Sadhu of Amritsar and a Muslim warden of the Borstal Jail figured as characters. But one day the manuscript was found by the prison authorities and Nanak Singh saw no more of it. It was entitled *Adh Khiri Kali* (The Half-blown Bud) and was presumably the first version of one of his famous novels, *Adh Khiria Phul* (The Half-blown Flower).

"It was at this time," says Nanak Singh, "that Gyani Bagh Singh's riddle that the remedy for my mental unrest lay in jail, became clear to me. Not only this, but I believe this nine months' imprisonment proved to be the maker of my future . . . And when after three quarters of a year I came out of prison I was feeling completely healthy in mind. I felt the existence of some great power within me. My morale, which had always been shaky, now rose to its full height." But his physical health had been considerably impaired by his term in jail.

On coming out of jail, Nanak Singh was received with great warmth by his former partner, Kirpal Singh, and his wife. They had two surprises in store for him. Kirpal Singh had brought out and sold to booksellers another edition of *Satguru Mahima*, the entire profits of which, about five hundred and fifty rupees,

he made over to Nanak Singh. The second surprise was much greater. Kirpal Singh and his wife had arranged to marry him to the daughter of Bhai Nikka Singh of Amritsar. Though their partnership had been dissolved before Nanak Singh went to jail, Kirpal Singh gave out that the firm belonged to Nanak Singh and he himself was only Nanak Singh's agent. This innocent subterfuge probably went a long way in making Nanak Singh acceptable as a bridegroom to his future father-in-law.

Nanak Singh is all praise for his wife, and regards it as highly fortunate that she proved deserving of it throughout their life together and presumably proved so even after her husband's death. "My wife was then thirteen or fourteen years old," writes Nanak Singh, "and about twelve years junior to me. Though by that time she had not got into the full bloom of youth, her features exercised a strange pull on me, features I have often drawn in my novels."

Nanak Singh writes further, "I was fairly vigilant in the matter of marriage. And my vigilance changed into fear when at first I heard I was going to be linked in life to a girl of Amritsar. About girls of Amritsar I had been hearing much—they are very headstrong, they make their husbands dance on their fingertips and so on." It made Nanak Singh anxious to see his betrothed before they were married. And he created an opportunity himself. He knew that she was a student at a girls' school of Chowk Passian. He had been told what she looked like. So one day he managed to see her while she was returning from school. He found nothing in her of the reported cleverness of Amritsar girls. On the other hand, he found her very innocent to look at. "I thought this faun will not make me dance on her fingertips, but certainly I will dance to her innocent love."

"Whenever the dispensation of destiny is discussed among my friends," says Nanak Singh, "I say that the two most valuable gifts vouchsafed me by providence are, one, my mother and the second, my children's mother."

Nanak Singh had now to decide what to do next. He consulted Ram Singh, a friend of his Peshawar days, and decided to set up a printing-press at Lahore in partnership with him. An amount of three thousand rupees was contributed towards the initial capital by Ram Singh's father on his son's behalf. This partnership lasted for just over a year. Nanak Singh under-

took the printing of Akali Party papers which soon invited the attention of the British Government. Its fake printer, one Inder Singh, was sent to jail for three years. Nanak Singh wanted to pay a pension of three hundred rupees a year to Inder Singh's family as long as he was to remain in jail. Ram Singh did not approve of this and so the partnership was dissolved with Nanak Singh taking over the press and giving Ram Singh a bond for three thousand plus the accruing interest.

Nanak Singh could not run the press mainly because it was risky to be the printer of political papers, which alone made it profitable. And Nanak Singh would no more engage a fake printer. Accordingly, it was sold at a loss and the proceeds were paid to Ram Singh to cover a large part of his bond. As long as Inder Singh remained in prison, Nanak Singh continued to pay twenty-five rupees a month to his family.

Soon, for all this, Nanak Singh found himself in debt to the extent of some six thousand rupees. But his song-book, *Satguru Mahima*, was selling well. He was able to repay a large part of the debt with the profit it brought, and the balance was paid by selling his wife's jewellery, which Nanak Singh ever appreciated as a great sacrifice on her part.

Nanak Singh now took to writing novels as a wholtime profession. But in the initial stages he experienced considerable difficulty in realising the sale proceeds from booksellers. His first novel, *Matrai Ma* (Step-mother), which was very small, brought him only ten rupees for its copyright and similarly the copyright for his second novel, *Kal Chakkar* (Wheel of Time) was sold for fifteen rupees. "I experienced some pain and jealousy also," Nanak Singh writes, "when I saw that both brought their publishers some hundreds of rupees within a year." The third novel Nanak Singh published on his own, as also his subsequent novels. They sold well, but the booksellers did not behave. Nanak Singh gave them his books on credit, and had to wait long to realise what accrued to him.

Nanak Singh's remarks in this context provide a good illustration of the state of creative writing and publishing in those days. "For years together," he writes, "this treatment continued. I went on publishing my books and throwing them at booksellers' shops, and then suffering indignities at their door to realise my dues. There was no respect or dignity in it. Anybody

would show me down whenever it pleased him. Suffering this ill-treatment I often felt so miserable that I felt like taking poison."

Then Nanak Singh tried the system of giving away his books to publishers on a royalty basis. But this proved an equally unsatisfactory alternative.

This sweating for a living continued for many years. It was only towards the end of his career, in the late fifties, that Nanak Singh found a good publisher in a friend of his *Prit Lari* fraternity, Pritam Singh of Nav Yug Publishers, Delhi.

During some of these years, 1933-1941, Nanak Singh lived at Prit Nagar, a colony of writers and artists established by the famous Panjabi writer, Gurbakhsh Singh.

Nanak Singh came to know Gurbakhsh Singh as a reader of his monthly *Prit Lari* (Chain of Love). And when in 1937, Gurbakhsh Singh announced his scheme of raising the *Prit Sena* (Army of Love), Nanak Singh was among the first to join it. The colony of Prit Nagar in Amritsar district was a part of this scheme of building 'a world of love'.

The first ten months of his membership Nanak Singh spent at Model Town, Lahore, from where the *Prit Lari* was printed in its own printing press, and Nanak Singh was appointed member in charge of the printing press.

On the 7th June, 1938, "the army of love" shifted to its permanent headquarters at Prit Nagar. But disillusionment soon set in for the idealist Nanak Singh. "The houses built for the Sainiks," writes he, "were quite commodious, each with a hall, a reading room, a bedroom, a bathroom provided with flush sanitation, a verandah and a spacious lawn in front. And a little way apart from the houses were the servants' quarters, each with a small mud-built room, hardly enough for two beds, and a kitchen about half that size."

This and similar other things, contrary, according to Nanak Singh, to the manifesto of the *Prit Sena*, rattled him in the beginning, but later he was reconciled to the atmosphere and began to enjoy it. As a consequence his writing flourished.

But the idealistic schemes of Gurbakhsh Singh were not faring well, and Nanak Singh's disillusionment and dissatisfaction grew apace. Ultimately, he came out of Prit Nagar in 1945, "though," as he writes, "even now my love for that small bit of earth is undiminished."

3

First Attempts

The First World War had ostensibly been fought to make democracy safe, and in Europe many subject peoples saw an end to their struggle for independence in the establishment of their self-governing nation states. But British rule in India showed not only reluctance to grant that quantum of self-government of which strong hopes were held by the Indian people, but to forestal any possible agitation clamped upon them repressive laws like the Rowlatt Act of 1919. Violence against repressive laws erupted in many places and events in central Panjab took an ugly turn. Martial law was declared in many parts of the Panjab culminating in what is known as the Jallianwala massacre at Amritsar on April 13, 1919. Under orders of General Dyer, the martial law administrator of Amritsar, British troops fired with machine guns on a public meeting in Jallianwala Bagh, killing over a thousand people and wounding many more.

Nanak Singh was perhaps too young and inexperienced at that time, but as an aftermath of the abortive nationalist struggle, the Gurudwara Reform Movement of 1920-22, popularly known as the Akali struggle, drew Nanak Singh into its vortex. As mentioned above, he went to jail as a *satyagrahi* in the Guru Ka Bagh agitation, out of which he emerged a nationalist, an admirer of Prem Chand, and a follower of Mahatma Gandhi. And from a writer of songs in praise of the

Gurus, he became a patriotic song-maker against alien rule and turned to writing novels of social reform. Of course, his early attempts at novel-writing show understandable immaturity.

Of his first novel *Matrai Ma* (Step-mother) Nanak Singh writes: "The story is simple and straightforward. The cruel treatment of her step-children by a step-mother is the background; woven into it is the story of the friendship of two children who, growing together from childhood into youth, become lovers and are in a dramatic denouement joined in marriage. That is all the story. No novelty, no uncommon love-romance; simple the language and the style."

In love stories of mediæval India a step-mother, young in years but married to an elderly man, soliciting the favours of a step-son of about her age, is common enough. The trend is moralistic and tragic. The stories of Emperor Asoka's son, Kunal, and Purna Bhakta, Rup and Basant, in ancient and mediæval India and of Phædra and Medea in ancient Greece show this trend. But Nanak Singh's treatment is different. He concentrates on the ill-treatment of step-children in most Indian homes. In the first twenty pages, Nanak Singh describes the maltreatment of the child, Madan, by his step-mother, Diali, which drives him out of home. Madan's father entrusts him to a neighbour, Pratap Singh. But Pratap Singh also becomes the target of Diali's wrath and is obliged to shift Madan to a foster home in Allahabad. This is obviously designed to provide a new milieu to Madan. There Madan is brought up in an atmosphere of domestic love and peace, and on coming of age he is sent by his foster-father to England to study at the Bar, something rather too much for a foster-child to expect from a foster-father. In the meanwhile the relationship of calf-love between Madan and Pratap Singh's daughter Shanti, matures into a love marriage to the performance of which Nanak Singh gives an unnecessary secrecy.

Madan is appointed public prosecutor at Ambala and one day Diali is produced in his court as a culprit. Unable to bear further persecution at the hands of her own son Jita, Diali had attempted to commit suicide by jumping into a well. Madan recognises her and gets the hearing postponed to the next day and goes to see her in jail. When Diali learns that Madan, the public prosecutor, is her step-son, she dies of the shock. Her

own son, Jita, has in the meantime been sent to the Andamans as a life-prisoner for committing dacoity and murder. Thus Nanak Singh draws, like all novices, the full circle of poetic justice. Indeed, it appears that the ill-treatment Madan receives from his step-mother has proved a blessing in disguise.

While in most other love stories of ancient and mediæval times, the man takes a second wife in the life-time of his first wife, in this story, Madan's father Mohinder Singh remarries only after his first wife's death. The moral of the tale of remarriage of such a man is reduced to enjoining upon man never to remarry if he has a child by his first wife.

In *Mitha Mahura* (Sweet Poison) the situation is somewhat different. Joginder Singh loves his wife Sakuntala, but remaining without a child for over twelve years, the usual period of suffering people have to undergo in folk-tales, he takes a second wife, Dalip Kaur, with Sakuntala's consent. But Sakuntala cannot help being jealous of Dalip Kaur. She gets a charm from a mendicant in order to keep Jogindar Singh's love. At this she is beaten, at Dalip Kaur's instance, to near death by her husband and sent to her parental house. But Dalip Kaur does not prove a faithful wife. She runs away with one Hem Raj, taking with her all the jewellery. She and Hem Raj are, however, arrested from a hotel in Calcutta. Dalip Kaur hands over her jewellery to Sakuntala's brother, as if to atone for her cruelty to Sakuntala, and later goes mad and dies. Sakuntala is not only brought back to Jogindar Singh, but also gives birth to a son. This is not enough compensation for Jogindar Singh, however. Having lost his job and suffered privations he had also gone mad. Now he regains both his health and his lost job.

The theme here also outflows the limits of social reform to become a story of evil receiving due punishment and good due reward. In India, a situation like that of Jogindar Singh and Sakuntala has not been very uncommon. But the complications of such a situation in this story have been resolved unduly.

The story of *Kal Chakkar* (Wheel of Time) is even more unrealistic. A rich cloth merchant of Lahore, Ram Nath, is attracted towards Kausalaya, the wife of a tailor, Ram Labhaya. One day he induces Ram Labhaya and his wife to accompany him on a pilgrimage to Haridwar. During the journey he manages to trick Ram Labhaya at a way-side railway station and enjoys a

tryst with Kausalaya. But Ram Labhaya is not to be put off so easily. He follows them to Haridwar and exposes Ram Nath's misdemeanour to such effect that Ram Nath has to run for life from fear of people's wrath. Meanwhile, Ram Labhaya becomes addicted to liquor and is driven out of his rented house for stealing. He goes to Sialkot, in search of work, while Kausalaya goes with her child to live at her maternal uncle's house. But the early death of her uncle leaves Kausalaya homeless again. Driven from post to pillar, Kausalaya one night finds the window of a house belonging to a wealthy man open and leaves her child there. The owner, Prabhu Dayal, who, to serve the purpose of the story, is issueless, is pleased to find the child and adopts it. Ram Labhaya, unable to find his wife, finds out instead Ram Nath, at a village in Lyallpur district and murders him for which he is sentenced to a long term in jail. Having completed his sentence, Ram Labhaya finds shelter on his way back home from rain and storm at Prabhu Dayal's house. Here he comes upon his son, named Manohar now, and also his wife who lives in the disguise of an ascetic.

The story is melodramatic. Ram Nath is punished twice for his wrong-doing, which is hardly fair. On the other hand, Ram Labhaya, a liquor-addict and murder, finds happiness and comfort which he seems hardly to deserve.

The story of *Prem Sangit* (The Music of Love) is even more complicated as well as more romantic. Dyal Singh, addicted to liquor and other vices, drives his wife out of his house with an infant daughter Maya in her arms. She becomes a prostitute, but before she dies, she has given her daughter training as a singer. Dyal Singh's son, Jagjit, on returning from school one day, finds a girl singing sweetly at a street corner, and is drawn towards her. He does not know that she, Maya, is his own sister, now named Lajji. In his infatuation, he draws picture after picture of Lajji. One summer he goes to Mussourie disguised as an ascetic, and a girl, Balwant Kaur, daughter of one Jogindar Singh, becomes enamoured of his singing for he sings well, too. Jagjit Singh's friend Jaswant Singh who knows of his infatuation, goes to Calcutta on an errand. One evening as he passes by a house, he comes upon a man in delirium with high fever. This man is Lajji's so-called uncle with whom she lives. This uncle dies soon after, and Jaswant takes charge of Lajji. Though he is also

drawn towards her, he regards her as a trust of his friend, whom he invites to Calcutta. Jagjit brings Lajji back to Amritsar, where he learns from his father that she is none other than his sister, Maya. After this, Lajji is married to Jaswant.

Thus, Nanak Singh makes his melodramatic stories end happily. For this, he does not hesitate to play ducks and drakes with his plots as well as characters.

4 Reformist Zeal

The first four novels of Nanak Singh's were so overlaid with romance that the social purpose was completely overshadowed. Nanak Singh's novel of social purpose truly begins with *Chitta Lahu* (White Blood, 1932), though it also has a strong ingredient of romance.

The model he had put before himself was Munshi Prem Chand. He writes, "The frightening and dreadful pictures that Prem Chand has painted in his novels and the heart-searching method he has employed, I wanted to emulate."

Chitta Lahu is a version of Nanak Singh's own cruel experiences, though its autobiographical character is not very evident. He has chosen for his hero one who lives for the ideal of reforming society. Indeed, Bachan Singh puts into practice what Nanak Singh was preaching in his novels.

The story of the novel is very complex, as if Nanak Singh has resolved to put into one frame all details of wrong-doing and social oppression that characterise middle-class Indian society.

Gurdei is married while quite young to an elderly man. The old man dies soon after. The grown-up step-sons do not give Gurdei any share from her husband's property. On the contrary, they make life miserable for her in every way. One stormy winter night she is driven out of the house, an extreme illustration of the miserable lot of a young widow in Indian middle-

class society. She is given shelter for the night by a kind-hearted Muslim woman. Gurdei has to pay heavily for this for, according to conservative Hindu ways, it is a pollution. And Baba Radha Singh and Pandit Radha Kishan—representatives of both Sikh and Hindu social leadership—ostracise her.

Radha Kishan is tempted to take advantage of poor Gurdei's helplessness. He sends her with one of his men to Sialkot to live with Tara Chand. Tara Chand plays foul with her. After getting her with child, he deserts her as she is lying ill in bed. (This Tara Chand is the man who later becomes a railway station-master, and has, in repentance, written out this story.) Meanwhile, a Muslim woman of the neighbourhood takes care of her in her illness and subsequent confinement. After some days when she goes back to her so-called home, nobody is there to own her. A bad character who makes a pretence of giving her shelter takes her to Delhi to sell her to a prostitute. (A widow must, in the tradition of Bengali and Hindi novels of those days, be driven to prostitution. In many of Nanak Singh's novels prostitution is the usual fate of young Hindu widows.) But he wants to get rid of the infant daughter in her arms, for it would stand in the way of his selling Gurdei. He persuades Gurdei to deposit the infant under a bush from where presumably a less cruel fate may send someone to pick her up. And so it happens; a mountebank, Rodu, comes upon the scene and picks up the infant whom he brings up as his own child and names her Sundari. As a mountebank's adopted child, Sundari becomes a dancer. In the course of his peregrinations, Rodu comes to the village from where Gurdei was driven out by her stepsons—a very convenient coincidence. They stay with one Bachan Singh there who at once takes kindly to Sundari. There Sundari starts studying with a friend of Bachan Singh's, Gyani Didar Singh.

Bachan Singh is a strong advocate of education, and of the preservation of the sacred character of temples that was in jeopardy owing to the corruption rampant among the priesthood, an echo of the Gurudwara Reform movement of the earlier decade of the twenties. Everybody praises Bachan Singh for his noble ways, but an evil-minded peasant, Pala Singh, and the priest of the Sikh Gurudwara, Dasaundha Singh, are secretly opposed to him. And when Bachan Singh marries Sundari, they find their

opportunity and get Bachan Singh ostracised by the village community.

In the meantime, Gurdei has also learnt dancing, a much-valued accomplishment for a prostitute, and has acquired the name of Anwar, for most prostitutes in North India find refuge in Islam. She is engaged as an entertainer at the marriage of none other than her own stepson. Here she is required to warm the beds of some of her customers, the same Radha Kishan who had ostracised her, and one Karam Chand. Gurdei alias Anwar stabs both of them to death and then kills herself. Pala Singh and party accuse Bachan Singh of this double murder and succeed in getting him tried for the crime and hanged. But Sundari avenges her husband's death by burning Pala Singh and his companions to death. Later, she kills herself, too.

In his introduction to the novel, Nanak Singh, analyses the current social situation and points out, among others, the following evils: its leaders consider it their duty to reject good and propitiate evil; in its temples and holy places, under the veneer of religion, there is nothing but the worship of liquor and factional strife; men of better quality in this land of the five rivers who are eager to reform society and have revolutionary potential in their pens, find it hard to earn a pittance; young men of promise in this country, who renounce all pleasure and comfort for the sake of society, earn only contempt, despair and in the end a rope to hang by.

By the title of the novel Nanak Singh seems to imply that in the life-blood of our society, red corpuscles have disappeared. Sundari writes in her letter to Bachan Singh: "So long as blood is not spilt from the veins of these people on this earth. . . future generations will not escape its evil effects." But it is not that Nanak Singh advocated violent revolution as a solution to problems. Such a method to effect reform in our society would be, according to Nanak Singh, like making a man bitten by a mad dog, take a bath.

Nanak Singh writes, "So far as my memory goes, the years between 1910 and 1930 were a period of vigorous reform movements in the Panjab, when numerous social evils like untouchability, selling of daughters in marriage, drinking, engaging courtesans to entertain with dance and song and worse, polygamy, old-age marriages, prostitution, and other such shameful

practices were rife in our society. And to eradicate these evils the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha were both working vigorously."

"In these evils the central problem was," says Nanak Singh, "the fallen state of Indian womanhood. It is a cureless malady, man's neglect of woman, the mother of man, being trampled under his own feet. The fallen state of woman and her oppression and exploitation in one form or other figure in all my novels."

In *Fauladi Phul* (Steel Flower, 1934) the keenness is considerably lessened, as if after the unrelieved tragedy of *Chitta Lahu* the writer's emotions needed some kind of rest. The title of this novel is expressive of the character of its heroine Sarala, who has the delicacy of a flower and the hardness of steel.

Prem Singh, a wealthy businessman of Batala, is left after his first wife's death, with a young daughter, Sarala. The second wife, Ratan, treats her cruelly. Mohan, their neighbour is of the same age as Sarala, and his sister Shanti and Sarala are friends. As Sarala grows up, her feelings for Mohan also ripen into love. But she is married to Trilok Singh, who is fifty years old, has poisoned his first wife, Kartar Kaur to death, and fallen, into the bargain, in the clutches of a prostitute, Gulzar. Naturally, Sarala is not happy in this married state but nevertheless she resists all overtures and challenges of Mohan's true love.

Mohan has his own problems. He is the editor of a paper in Lahore whose policy is one of sowing discord between Hindus and Sikhs, on the one hand, and Hindu's and Muslims, on the other. The owner, Uttam Singh, also blackmails insurance companies. However, Mohan soon gives up service and begins writing stories for films, which brings him some income. In fact, Mohan has been able to give up Uttam Singh's service through Sarala's kindness in secretly giving him five hundred rupees with which he has come to live in a cottage in Srinagar.

Trilok Singh's clerk, Jagat Singh, has an eye on the young Sarala, and sows seeds of suspicion in her husband's mind. When Mohan, leaving for Kashmir, comes at night to say good-bye to Sarala, Trilok Singh sees him, and being in a drunken state, he beats Sarala into unconsciousness. And fearing that she is dead, he poisons himself to death.

Sarala is suspected of killing Trilok Singh, but just at the moment when the judge is about to pronounce the sentence of death on her, a conscience-stricken Jagat Singh comes forward to take all the blame on himself. He even admits that he had brought poison for Trilok Singh to administer to and kill his first wife, Kartar Kaur. Jagat Singh takes poison then and there and dies. Sarala who is now acquitted, finds out Mohan in Kashmir and joins him.

This novel makes a difference with *Chitta Lahu* in so far as the oppressed woman does not become a prostitute, nor does she commit suicide in the end. There is a prostitute in this novel, too, but she is a minor character, and is not a Hindu widow but probably belongs to the Kanjar or professional prostitute community. Of repentance and suicide there is of course much and to spare in this story.

There are hypocritical men of religion in this novel also, like the physician Mohan Singh and the journalist, Uttam Singh, but they are not of the priestly profession like the Granthi in *Chitta Lahu*.

One of the villains in this novel, Jagat Singh, also repents like the villain Tara Chand of *Chitta Lahu*, but whereas Tara Chand lives and serves under the Government, though his life is unhappy, Jagat Singh poisons himself to death.

Both *Fauladi Phul* and *Kagatan di Beri* (Paper Boat) were published in 1934. The hero and heroine of *Fauladi Phul*, Mohan and Sarala, figure as secondary characters in *Kagatan di Beri* though even secondary characters they are not really needed for the story. Their only connection with the story is that Mohan's sister, Shanti, a minor character in *Fauladi Phul* is married to the hero, Prem. But Prem's wife could have been any other girl unrelated to Mohan without making any difference to the story.

The hero (or villain?) of *Kagatan di Beri*, Prem, is the son of a rich general merchant, Rala Ram of Amritsar. Under the evil influence of Gopal Singh, he falls into the clutches of Jamuna, a prostitute. When the story opens he has already sold a part of his property and spent it on Jamuna and Gopal Singh. Mohan's sister, too, married to Prem, finds no happiness in her husband's house.

Shanti's neighbour's daughter Sushila who is married to the Gandhian Sunder Das does not like him and enters into a liaison

with Prem. But she is not a vamp. Indeed, it is she who, out of sympathy, warns Shanti against Jamuna and even quarrels with Prem over this.

When Prem has sold off all his property and belongings and his wife bewails her lot, Jamuna and Gopal Singh are moved to pity and return to Shanti the jewellery of which they had cheated Prem. Prem comes upon them and tries to shoot Jamuna with a pistol. But the bullet misses Jamuna and kills Shanti instead.

Prem becomes a fugitive from law, and Gopal Singh and Jamuna, repenting of their sins, become Sadhus and open a rescue home for shelterless women. In the end, Prem, in the garb of a fakir takes to standing at the gate of the rescue home, presumably for alms, and, after a few days, dies there of hunger and exposure. Jamuna and Gopal Singh are saddened when they recognise him.

Nanak Singh has called Prem's life of luxury and sin a paper-boat that must sink sooner or later. But the social theme here is weak and the story is at most only a moral lesson. The part and responsibility of the social order in making Jamuna a prostitute is the same old story of the oppressed woman turning into an oppressor, if Gopal Singh's account of her is to be believed. Why is Gopal Singh a villain and how is the social order responsible for it, is something that Nanak Singh does not account for.

"About half-a-dozen novels in the next few years, *Piar di Dunia* (The World of Love), *Garib di Dunia* (The World of the Poor), *Tutti Vina*, *Adh Khiria Phul* and *Gangajali vich Sharab* have about the same background as the earlier novels," writes Nanak Singh "but they clearly show the influence of popular movements like the Congress, the Socialist Party, the Anarchist Party, etc." Perhaps by the Anarchist Party, Nanak Singh here means the Communist Party.

In *Piar di Dunia* the central story is the love of Sundar Das and Pushpa. Sohan Singh, the villain, also loves Pushpa, and to achieve his object, he gets Pushpa's brother Pritam Singh recruited as a police sub-inspector.

When Hindu-Muslim riots break out, in which a friend of Pritam Singh, Sadiq, stabs Sundar Das, the latter deliberately does not identify Sadiq as a consequence of which Sadiq is

acquitted. Sadiq is deeply moved at this and writes a penitent letter to Pritam Singh. From the hospital Sundar Das is brought to Pritam Singh's house, where he and Pushpa take vows of mutual love. Pushpa rejects Sohan Singh's love.

After completing training at Phillaur, Pritam Singh is posted at Amritsar where he arrests some bigwigs of the town and petty police officers under charges of corruption. This brings him much credit and he is sent to Delhi to investigate a case of serious crime.

Meanwhile Sundar Das has also come to Delhi. One day he rescues from the Jamuna, a young woman Manorama, who has plunged into it to escape the designs of two villains, Sadhu Omkar Nath and Seth Prabh Dayal. Sundar Das goes to report the case to the police and there comes across Pritam Singh who is greatly pleased to see him.

During the investigations Pritam Singh comes across a woman who has nearly lost her wits. She is Sohan Singh's step-mother, Ganga Dei. She had eloped with Sadhu Omkar Nath after her husband's murder, but is now very sore with Omkar Nath. Seth Prabh Dyal, his clerk Mulkh Raj, and a physician who under Prabh Dayal's influence gives a deadly poison to one Rup Lal, are arrested. Omkar Nath and Pritam Singh's own father are also arrested for involvement in this case, on warrants issued by Pritam Singh. Prabh Dyal, seeing that a death sentence is inevitable, hangs himself in his cell. He has left a will in which he has given away all his property for works of charity, and made Pritam Singh its trustee. Omkar Nath and Nazir Ahmed are hanged, while Pritam Singh's father is let off with a fine of a thousand rupees.

At this juncture Pushpa takes a vow of life-long celibacy and work in the service of her motherland. Under the name of Bharat Putri she joins a terrorist group whose leader, Babaji, has killed an approver in the Lahore Conspiracy Case.

Pritam Singh comes to Lahore to arrest the members of this group including Pushpa, not knowing that she is his own sister. Pushpa reports this to her group and they hire Aftab to kill Pritam Singh. Sohan Singh who is now an informer of Pritam Singh, is killed in a hotel.

However, under the influence of Sundar Das, Pushpa resolves to shun violence. She speaks of this to Babaji. For this she is

condemned by the group and can be forgiven only if she kills both her brother Pritam Singh and her lover, Sundar Das. But she kills Babaji, instead.

In the end Pushpa is married to Sundar Das and Pritam Singh to Manorama. In this world of love, the heroine becomes a believer in non-violence after murdering Babaji, the leader of her own group of terrorists.

In this fashion, Nanak Singh demarcates four kinds of love—love between man and woman as a factor of married life, love of one's community or sect, love of the motherland, and love or friendship between two men. Nanak Singh applauds the first and fourth but condemns communal or sectarian love unreservedly, and patriotism if it is violent.

According to Nanak Singh's own version, *Garib di Duniya* seems to have been written under the influence of the Utopian Socialism of the Indian National Congress. In it he has depicted the settlement of the capital-labour struggle in a liberal idealist way. The forty workmen of Lala Amarnath's factory at Lahore live in forty rooms of a large *serai*-like building whose roof leaks. The workmen who include both Hindu and Muslim have not been paid three months' wages. Shankar and Karam Din lead the strike of the workmen asking for payment of their wages and Lala Amarnath gets Shankar sent to prison. Shankar's wife is dead and his daughter Malti is left alone in her father's room from where she is soon driven out in a state of high fever. Karam Din and his wife Salima take her to their own room.

Lala Amarnath's son, Baldev, sympathises with the workmen. He gives them back the room from which they had been evicted and takes Malti to a doctor. When she is well again he and Malti go to see Shankar in jail.

Of course, it is not possible for Baldev to continue living in the same house with his father. He begins to live separately from him and organises a union of the workmen. For a living, he teaches Seth Bansi Lal's son.

Baldev's mother, Parvati, is anxious to see Baldev whom she meets in Malti's room. She at once accepts Malti as her future daughter-in-law and gives her own necklace as a token.

Meanwhile Dr Sharma in consultation with Lala Amar Nath, gives it in newspapers that Malti has been converted into a

Muslim by Karam Din. This leads to a communal riot, as often happened in those days when the Panjab had not been partitioned. Karam Din, Baldev and also Dr Sharma are arrested for causing communal riots.

When Malti learns that riots have broken out because of her, she goes out to put her head before a running train, but the elderly guard stops the train just in time to save her. In jail Baldev learns of his father's hand behind the outbreak of riots and reports it to the police, with the result that Lala Amar Nath is also arrested.

Lala Amar Nath dies of remorse right in the court. Shankar and his comrades are all released. Baldev who has now become the owner of the factory, makes peace with the workmen and marries Malti. But poor Shankar whose health has been shattered, does not live to see this happy end.

Obviously, here also Nanak Singh shows love coming out victorious against class strife. He believes that capital-labour discord can be overcome by love, without resort to any kind of revolutionary action; and love's pattern here is the capitalist's son marrying the workman's daughter.

Adh Khiria Phul and *Pavittar Papi* (The Pure Sinner) are more personal tragedies than social documents. The hero of *Adh Khiria Phul*, Kuldip Singh is married to Satwant and they have a child. But a woman widowed in childhood, Saroj, falls in love with him and he reciprocates her love. This leads to discord between Kuldip Singh and his wife, with the result that Kuldip Singh joins the Guru Ka Bagh satyagraha and is sent to prison. His mother, Gian Kaur, has only two things to do; to recite the name of the Lord and to curse her daughter-in-law Satwant. By the time Kuldip Singh comes out of jail, Satwant is dead. But he does not marry Saroj, for he has become disillusioned with life.

At this juncture a prostitute who has been rescued from serious trouble by a saintly old man, Varyam Singh, and promises to mend her ways, finds employment with Kuldip Singh as his son's nurse, under the name of Prakash. She soon wins Kuldip Singh's heart, who throwing Saroj's love overboard marries her.

One day on returning from Amritsar after purchasing a stock of cloth for his shop, he finds Prakash drinking and smoking. Kuldip Singh drives her out of his house. In the mean-

time both his parents die. Kuldip is disgusted with the world. He also suspects Saroj, whom he still loves, of having illicit relations with the saintly Varyam Singh.

Meanwhile Kuldip's motherless child is brought to Lahore by a Muslim friend of his, Ahmed Khan, to be given into the care of his wife. Prakash also somehow finds her way to where the child is. After leaving his house Kuldip comes to the same place too. He is pleased to find Prakash there, and forgiving her lapse, marries her anew.

Varyam Singh and Saroj have also come to Lahore in search of Kuldip Singh. When they get down at Lahore railway station, they see Kuldip, Prakash, Ahmed Din and his wife board another train. Saroj is so shocked that she falls down unconscious on the platform and dies as she is being brought back to Peshawar.

This novel is better written and better organised than Nanak Singh's other novels up to this time, and has an added significance in that Nanak Singh indicates that he has drawn Saroj after his boyhood's love, Savitri, and that Varyam Singh is modelled after Gyani Bagh Singh. There is an idealistic strain in Saroj's unwavering love of Kuldip which he hardly deserves.

Pavittar Papi is similarly the story of a unique sacrifice on the part of a young man for a family whom he thinks he has unknowingly wronged.

Kidar Nath, a young graduate, untrammelled with aged parents and young siblings, comes to Rawalpindi to find employment as a clerk of a watch merchant, Atar Singh. In this job he has replaced Panna Lal who has been dismissed for a defalcation. Not able to bear the shame of it Panna Lal has deserted his wife and children and gone away to an unknown destination intending to commit suicide. This he is not able to do, but he writes to Kidar Nath of his predicament.

Kidar goes to Panna Lal's house and tells his wife that Panna Lal has gone to Bombay on some business of his master. He rents a room in the neighbourhood and offers to give tuition to Panna Lal's eldest daughter, Vina, in return for his meals. Every month he gives some money to Panna Lal's wife, Maya, giving her to believe that it has been sent by Panna Lal.

Kidar also mortgages his parental house to finance Vina's marriage. He undertakes to repay to Atar Singh the amount

misappropriated by Panna Lal, to save Maya from his oppression. After this he leaves Rawalpindi. Maya comes to know of all this from none other than Atar Singh himself. And Vina also finds in Kidar's room the letter from Panna Lal addressed to Kidar Nath, from which the family comes to know of Panna Lal's true story.

Kidar Nath goes to Amritsar where he gets employment again with a watch merchant. He overworks and starves himself in order to send money to Maya and to repay Atar Singh's debt.

Panna Lal had, however, only gone to Haridwar. He returns to Rawalpindi after some time where he is told of Kidar Nath. Because of over-work and undernourishment, Kidar contracts tuberculosis. When on the brink of death, he gets a wire sent to Panna Lal. Panna Lal and Maya go to Amritsar to be told of Kidar having died the night before. Vina dies of grief when she learns of Kidar's death.

This novel was filmed by Balraj Sahni who was a great admirer of Nanak Singh. Of course, the novel has all the ingredients of melodrama, as Indian films generally have. It deals with unemployment, rife in Indian towns and the misery of the urban poor, in an indirect manner.

There is more contemporary social content in the next two novels, *Jiwan Sangram* (The Battle of Life) and *Dhundale Parchhavan* (Misty Shadows). In *Jiwan Sangram*, Puran Chand is married to Usha, the only daughter of a wealthy landlord, Dev Raj, of Multan district. Usha is plain-looking and Puran Chand is unable to give his love to her. He has his eye on his father-in-law's land and on the beauty of Champa, daughter of Durga Das, one of Dev Raj's servants.

Puran Chand and Usha go to Kashmir, where Usha, fired with the zeal of a social reformer, takes in her charge a derelict Banta, who was caught pilfering. Banta proves to be a talented person and under Usha's encouragement learns music and achieves surprising proficiency in the art. He comes to be known as Master Balwant.

While Usha's attention is diverted towards Banta, Puran Chand succeeds in seducing Champa whom Usha has brought with her to Kashmir. The situation becomes very unpleasant for Usha when she comes to know of it. This produces keen remorse in Champa's mind and she hangs herself. Usha, distracted and

forlorn, stumbles down a precipice and dies. However, before dying she succeeds in getting her father to forgive Puran Chand—a traditional trait of a virtuous Indian wife.

Nanak Singh does not show any conscious awareness of the social inequity of landlordism, but nevertheless the situation has much to suggest in that way. True to type, Dev Raj also first contracts intimacy with Champa's mother Ganga, and then after Usha's death marries Lajwanti. Whether any part of his property will come to Puran Chand or not, Nanak Singh does not indicate.

Another villain of the piece is Dev Raj's estate manager, who is not only serviceable to Puran Chand but does much to deprive him.

The villain in *Dhundale Parchhavan* is Devindar Singh who is in a way representative of the trading and industrial middle-class. He is a profligate and keeps a mistress Damodari, a widow whose husband was a worker in a printing-press. Devindar Singh has seduced Damodari's daughter, Subhadra also. To save Subhadra from Devindar Singh's lust, Damodari takes her away to Delhi. But she dies soon after. Her helpless daughter falls into the clutches of pimps and is initiated into prostitution. A son is born to her sometime later and there is no doubt of his close resemblance to Devindar Singh.

Devindar Singh has only one child, his daughter Ramindar, who is shown to be, at the beginning of the story, a medical student at Lahore. On a visit to her home at Amritsar she learns from Ratana, Damodari's son, who drives Devindar Singh's tonga, the story of Damodari and Subhadra. Taking Ratana with her, Ramindar goes to Delhi with the purpose of rescuing the poor woman. Meanwhile by a strange coincidence, such as is normal in Nanak Singh's stories, Naubat Rai, elder brother of Subhadra's dead father, who had ill-treated Damodari, visits Subhadra for a night's pleasure. In the course of the night, Subhadra comes to know of his identity and stabs him to death. She is tried and hanged. Ramindar and Ratana bring Subhadra's son Kishor to Amritsar. The penitent Devindar Singh accepts Kishor as his son.

During this time Ramindar has taught Ratana to read and write and she arranges his marriage with Lila, daughter of Panchu, a servant of the family. And not to forget that there

must be an idealistic turn to the story, Nanak Singh makes Ramindar take a vow of life-long celibacy and dedicate herself to the service of her motherland.

In another of his novels *Love Marriage*, the theme, as is evident from the title, is one which was much discussed in middle-class circles in the thirties and forties of this century. Nanak Singh widens the scope and presents three kinds of love-marriages, as distinguished from traditional marriages. In the introduction to this novel Nanak Singh writes, "On the stage of life I present to you three couples playing the game of love marriage. . . . At the conclusion . . . your reason itself will accept one kind of love marriage as honourable and condemn any other kind. In broad terms, first is the best (ideal), the second of the middle variety (conventional) and the third the worst (passionate).

The best or ideal kind of marriage is that of Indrapal and Arvind. Indrapal, son of a poor family, who after passing his matriculation, is on a visit to his mother's sister, Maya. There he takes an innocent fancy to Raj Kumari, daughter of the younger brother-in-law of Maya. However, he has to leave her aunt's house in search of livelihood. Soon he finds himself in Peshawar where he becomes friendly with a Panjabi Muslim young man Akhtar Hussain, a painter. Akhtar loves his cousin Zuleikha and marries her. This is love marriage of the middle variety in complete accord with the social conventions.

At Dinanagar where Indrapal goes to see his sister, he happens to read in the public library a book of poems in Hindi, *Nav-Jivan* and is at once drawn to its author, a girl, Arvind, who lives at Lahore. Indrapal goes to see her in Lahore and presumably makes a favourable impression.

Meanwhile Raj Kumari's mother, pressed by poverty, finds employment as a kitchen-maid in the house of Chaudhari Bhola Nath, whose son Raghunath seduces Raj Kumari and takes her away to Calcutta. Indrapal reads in a newspaper of Raj Kumari's alleged elopement with Raghunath. On mere guesswork, he goes to Kashmir to look for Raj Kumari. Arvind also accompanies him. At Srinagar, he receives a letter from a penitent Raghunath telling him how he had brought Raj Kumari to Calcutta, who feeling deceived has leapt out of the hotel window and is now awaiting death.

Indrapal goes to Calcutta and meets Raj Kumari in hospital. He writes to Arvind, who goes to Calcutta, too, along with her father. Raj Kumari's dying wish is that Indrapal and Arvind should marry. Nanak Singh's idealists have their bread buttered on both sides, generally. This is the ideal love marriage of Nanak Singh's conception. The third is the marriage that Raghunath had wanted to contract with Raj Kumari.

Dur Kinara (The Further Bank) is again a story of personal tragedy without much social concern. The heroine, Madhuri, and her mother live at the latter's brother's house, because Madhuri's father Bikram Singh is employed at Kanpur and her maternal uncle, Thakar Krishan Dev Singh, has no issue of his own.

Madhuri's mother develops a tumour in her stomach and gets hospitalised for an operation. A young man Prithipal Singh who has taken poison is also in the same hospital. He succeeds in winning Madhuri's heart.

Bikram Singh comes to see his wife in hospital and gives Madhuri a book to read. Madhuri is greatly impressed with the book and writes a letter of admiration to its author, Chakravarti. Chakravarti writes back to tell her that he is returning from Kashmir after yielding his only daughter Jyotsana to the funeral pyre. Her death had been brought about by her being deceived in love by a youth, Indra Kumar.

Madhuri becomes the foster-daughter of Chakravarti, and tells him of Prithipal Singh whom she had intended to marry but later rejected for being a loafer.

Madhuri, is married to Amar Singh, a handsome, gentle and hardworking youth. He is an overseer in the Public Works Department. One day he reads a letter of Chakravarti to Madhuri, on the basis of which he suspects Chakravarti of being Madhuri's lover. The post-master at Pathankot who is a friend of Amar Singh, has earlier told him of Madhuri's two lovers, Prithipal Singh and Chakravarti. Madhuri's pride is injured and she refuses to explain anything.

Madhuri then writes to Chakravarti not to write to her anymore. Chakravarti comes to Madhuri's home and gets employed as a house servant. He tries to bring about peace between Amar Singh and Madhuri, but in vain.

In the meantime he has written a novel based on his letters

to Madhuri written before her marriage and, leaving the draft of the novel and a letter for Amar Singh, he goes to Khir Bhavani in Kashmir where he had cremated his daughter.

Amar Singh reads the novel and Chakravarti's letter and comes to know the truth. He asks Madhuri's forgiveness and goes along with her to Khir Bhavani to meet Chakravarti. As Chakravarti relates Jyotsana's tragic story to Madhuri and Amar Singh, it is found that Indra Kumar and Prithipal Singh were false names of a scoundrel Vishva Nath.

Nanak Singh says that in Jyotsana's person he has sketched his mother and himself in Chakravarti. But what is revealed of his mother's real story after this transformation is next to nothing.

Tutti Vina (The Broken Violin) and *Gangajali vich Sharab* (Liquor for Holy Water) are companion novels. In *Tutti Vina* a young man, Ganga Ram, marries, out of reformist zeal, Satya, a prostitute. Satya already has a ten-year old daughter, Pratima, whom she wants to save from her own ignominious profession. Pratima passes the middle school examination at the age of fifteen, but no respectable young man is willing to marry her on account of her mother's profession. In consequence, Satya commits suicide by drowning herself in a canal.

Pratima writes poetry and attends public meetings arranged by the Congress Party, in the course of which she falls in love with a Congress worker, Uday Shankar, son of a Harijan, Dr Seth. He is sent to prison as a Congress agitator, where he comes under the influence of a patriot of the Ghadar movement, and resolves to forget about love and Pratima. When Uday Shankar comes out of jail, Pratima and her step-father are puzzled at Uday Shankar's changed attitude. Subsequently Pratima becomes a seamstress to earn her living.

Eventually Pratima is married to an elderly person Fateh Chand who already has a wife and three daughters. In about a year's time Pratima also gives birth to a daughter who is named Sita. Fateh Chand, however, is unable to bear Pratima's relations with Uday Shankar, however innocent, and drives her out of his house. Meanwhile Uday Shankar contracts tuberculosis in jail and dies.

Pratima goes to live with her step-father, Ganga Ram, at his village. But Ganga Ram dies of grief on hearing of Pratima's

cruel fate. The villagers drive Pratima out of the village for being a prostitute's daughter. Pratima brings her daughter to Lahore. She takes to prostitution in order to earn and save enough for her daughter Sita to live a respectable life.

Here Nanak Singh has unwittingly condemned the idealism of Uday Shankar which lands Pratima into an unhappy marriage and later prostitution.

The novel starts with Pratima having earned enough money to buy a house at Lyallpur and settle there. She has taken the name of Prabhadevi and given the name of Urvashi to Sita. Fateh Chand has mended his ways, taken the name of Amar Bharati and brings out a paper at Lahore.

At Lyallpur a very gentle young man, Madan, is engaged to teach Urvashi, and the two fall in love. But in the meantime a friend of Madan, Prakash, a young man of low morals, has so impressed Prabhadevi with his wealth, that she gives Urvashi in marriage to him. Prakash's profession, is to employ call-girls at Mussourie and other such places. He takes Prabhadevi and Urvashi also to Mussourie. There Urvashi discloses Prakash's evil doings to her mother, who is so shocked at it that she falls down and gets seriously hurt.

Urvashi immediately telegraphically summons Madan to her aid. He has now become the manager of Amar Bharati's newspaper. Both he and Amar Bharati reach Mussourie but they cannot save Prabhadevi. Urvashi, however, is brought back by her father. Thus Satya's offspring earns liberation from the profession of prostitution only in the third generation. In this novel, evidently, Nanak Singh means to show how difficult it is for even innocent people to live down the ignominy and shame of the shady past of their forebears even when reformed.

5

After Independence

After Independence there is a marked change of emphasis in Nanak Singh's social preoccupation. Before Independence there was less awareness in him of the economic factor in a social system and of the responsibilities of the political and administrative authority. The emphasis was largely on the individual factor and on the traditional notions of right and wrong. For instance, a young widow was always so ill-treated by her dead husband's family as to drive her into the arms of seducers and pimps and traffickers in women. The hero was always an idealist trying to rescue her or better her lot by personal sacrifice. Although in novels like *Piar di Duniya* and *Garib di Duniya*, Nanak Singh took up problems of the new social order, like the capital-labour conflict or communal riots, he did not go into their economic causes. He just mouthed the formulas of the middle-class social leadership who shirked their own responsibility and blamed either the hypocrisy of religious leaders, priests, etc. or the British Government. The social phenomenon remained beyond his ken.

In his novels written after Independence he is more aware of the working of the social, political and economic factors, though his understanding of their mechanism and motive force is still superficial and deficient, and the factor of personal idealism still remains active.

But before registering this changed understanding, Nanak Singh's awareness is assaulted suddenly by the tragic happenings accompanying the partition of Panjab, and he can do little more than repeat the old formulas. For instance, he writes in the introduction to the first of his two novels devoted to the tragic aspect of the partition, *Khun de Sohile* (The Paeans of Blood), "What happened in the fateful year 1947, and the cycle of brutality and rapacity that came into motion, did not leave unaffected any Hindu, Muslim or Sikh whatever."

In the village of Chakri in the Attack district in West Panjab, Bhaneshah, a Hindu shopkeeper and moneylender is caught up in Muslim attacks on the Hindu population. He has in his charge, apart from his own family, the family of a Muslim peasant Rahim Bakhsh, consisting of his wife, daughter Nasim and son Aziz. How this Muslim family comes under Bhaneshah's care is not adequately explained, except that Rahim Bakhsh is employed away from home. Nanak Singh does not care for the unreality of this situation in which the Muslim kinsmen of Rahim Bakhsh in the village will not be so unconcerned towards his wife and children. In the up-shot when Bhaneshah escapes to India it is not with his own womenfolk, but with Nasim whom he gives out to be his daughter.

The story is continued in the next novel, *Agg de Khed* (The Sport of Fire). In the precincts of the Golden Temple of Amritsar, where Bhaneshah has escaped with Nasim, are staying refugees from Pothohar, that is, the Rawalpindi division of West Panjab. People bring them help in the shape of food and clothing. Among such people is Brijinder. He and his mother, Kesar Kaur, bring home with them Bhaneshah and his putative daughter, Nasim alias Krishna.

Brijinder is a member of the local committee of Hindu-Muslim Unity. But the hair-raising narration by Bhaneshah of the fate of the other members of his family affects Brijinder in such a way that he joins a group of Hindu rioters and takes part in looting and killing Muslims. It is natural, however, for him to be drawn towards Krishna and for Krishna towards him. As such Krishna attends one day with Brijinder a meeting of his group of rioters. There she speaks to the effect that though these lootings and killings were started by Muslims under the instigation of the Muslim League, the way they, Hindus and

Sikhs, were reacting was no remedy. It was like washing blood with blood.

On the other side of the frontier, a Muslim youth Yusuf, who had been greatly moved by the violence committed by his co-religionists on the Hindus, comes to the help of Bhaneshah's family, and brings Bhaneshah's daughter-in-law, Rukman, along with her jewellery worth about thirty thousand rupees, to Bhaneshah in Amritsar.

Many romantic complications occur, but in the end one of the Hindus rioters, Sudarshan, coming to know that the girl called Krishna is in reality a Muslim girl, shoots her dead and Yusuf, whose real name is Shafi, kills himself.

The next novel, *Manjhdhar* (Midstream) presents social events that took place in India in the wake of Independence and Partition. At this time when about half a million people were killed on both sides of the border, with indescribable outrage to human dignity, especially the honour of women, Hindu and Sikh refugees, numbering not less than two million were being tossed from place to place in the process of rehabilitation. There was corruption, degeneration and even men who had been unwavering patriots and made great sacrifices in the national cause, were caught in the current. In *Manjhdhar* the ship of the Congress leaders' morality and integrity is shown tossing in midstream, of which only one way is visible, that of repentance and penance.

The hero, Dr Anand, is an erstwhile selfless Congress worker. But now he is caught in the temptation of grabbing as much of evacuee property as he can and making political gains. The journalist Shukla, and many other people, merchants and civil servants, are his accomplices and partners.

The heroine, Punnya, a refugee, is a beautiful woman leading a simple life. Her entire family had been killed in the riots.

Punnya takes up a job with Dr Anand and eventually grows to love him. But she dislikes Dr Anand's lust for money and power. Ultimately she succeeds in changing Dr Anand and bringing him back to his old honourable way of life.

It is quite evident that whereas Nanak Singh's depiction of post-independence social corruption and degradation is quite effective, his idealism is rather unconvincing.

In *Chitrakar* (The Painter) Nanak Singh has brought out all

that had entered his awareness of the social scene after Independence about the fine arts, social service, sexual morality, money economy and the way to fight and overcome all difficulties relating to them.

The first part of the novel relates the story of a lascivious wealthy man, Dwarka Das. He had married a young Kashmiri woman but then treated her so cruelly that she died, leaving behind two daughters, Sadhana and Kusum. When Kusum grows up, she is trapped by Vinod, and when she becomes pregnant, he discards her. She is on the brink of death at Dalhousie, when the painter Prabhakar comes to save her.

The second part relates the story of Prabhakar and his household. He is very poor and goes to Bombay in search of a livelihood. In his absence, his wife, Shyama, son Subhash and daughter Shashi pass their days in abject indigence. In 1947 they have to leave Rawalpindi and seek refuge in Delhi. Subhash turns into a vagabond and indulges in every possible vice. In her utter need, Shyama agrees to make her daughter mistress of Dwarka Das.

Prabhakar meanwhile prospers in Bombay. But under some idealistic impulse, he becomes obsessed with the ambition to paint a portrait of Yashodhara, wife of Gautama Buddha. He goes to Srinagar in search of a model which he finds in Ravindira. And when the portrait is nearly finished he is overcome by lust for Ravindira and his brush stops working. He leaves Srinagar for Rawalpindi. He gets no clue of his family there and thinks they have all been killed in the riots. So he returns to Dalhousie. There he comes upon Kusum, at the moment when she is about to throw herself down a precipice. He saves her and finds in her another model for his portrait of Yashodhara.

To protect the good name of Kusum, Prabhakar only formally and ostensibly marries her. Her child is taken over by the issueless wife of the artist who was Prabhakar's master.

Subhash who was jailed for theft, succeeds in winning over a warder to let him out. He comes in the night to Dwarka Das's house with the intent of killing him. But just at that time Prabhakar comes upon the scene and Dwarka Das is saved.

Dwarka Das is, of course, impressed by Prabhakar's nobility and repents of his sins. He places his property worth many

crores at Prabhakar's disposal and makes Prabhakar agree to the marriage of his wastrel son to Kusum, of course, taking for granted that Kusum would agree. Prabhakar also has no qualms against letting his son marry a woman who, even though for appearance's sake, was his own wife and thus Subhash's step-mother.

Nanak Singh says in this context that an artist must be a noble soul. So long as the artist's soul, rising above the world's level, does not touch the height of saintliness, he cannot become an artist in the right sense of the word. Such a perfect artist's every word and glance has the power of Rama's arrow. And perhaps it was the arrow shot by Prabhakar that instantaneously brought Dwarka Das down. The novel is not concerned with what happens subsequently to Sudha and Shashi.

In *Kati Hoi Patang* (Snapped Kite), published in 1951, Nanak Singh compares woman to a kite flown by man. He has taken three situations of this kite, in the shape of three women, Kesari, Chambeli and Kamini. Kesari is the kite that, cut in mid-air, falls into the hands of kite-robbers, that is, she becomes a call-girl. Chambeli is another kind of a kite. Daughter of a gardener from Assam, she falls in love with Sukhbir, son of the family employing her father. Sukhbir requites her love, but his parents do not allow him to marry her. He leaves the parental house and goes to Amritsar, where he becomes widely known as a writer, especially of songs. Thwarted in love, Chambeli contracts tuberculosis and her father takes her to a village in Bikaner, for its dry climate. After sometime when Sukhbir comes to know of it, he and an elderly friend, Gokal Chand, father of Kamini, bring Chambeli to Amritsar. Thus, Chambeli is a kite whose thread is her love which holds her fast so that she does not get lost.

But the heroine of the novel is Kamini, a kite of quite a different kind, who can fly in the sky of its own. She is married to Brij Mohan who keeps her happy for some years, but when she has become the mother of two children, she loses all charm for Brij Mohan. He becomes the lover of the servant-maid Kesari, mentioned above. When Kesari becomes pregnant he persuades her to go in for abortion. The police comes to know of it and to ward it off, Brij Mohan asks Kamini for her jewellery. On her refusal to do so, she is driven out.

Kamini goes to her father, who is a neighbour of Sukhbir. She and Sukhbir develop fraternal affection for each other. By Sukhbir's example, Kamini comes to acquire fame as a writer and singer. She then goes into the film-line and makes good as an actress, writer and singer at the same time. Having acquired a lot of wealth she goes to live in a house on Malabar Hill in Bombay.

Under Sukhbir's influence, Brij Mohan also mends his ways. He becomes a labour leader and wins Kamini's forgiveness.

Kamini claims that she has not taken to films to amass wealth. She wants to devote herself to the betterment of the lot of women in our society. Sukhbir tells Kamini that mere philanthropy will not avail, a complete revolution is needed. Chambeli explains to her the contemporary situation. The English people ruled the country before Independence, she says. "But they had come here only to exploit and this they went on doing. Now when the reins of Government are in the hands of our own people, there should have been some let-up in exploitation, but, on the other hand, exploitation has increased. It was expected of the new ruling class that they would end the people's hardships. But they have become allies and agents of the exploiters."

Kamini is greatly impressed, and begins to think of going to live in a workers' colony and depict their life-struggle in her films. In the meantime she and Brij Mohan are reconciled and re-united.

True to Nanak Singh's philosophy, Kamini does not believe in a violent revolution. She tells Sukhbir, "The incendiaries and bomb-throwers of whom you speak, will prove to be the greatest enemies of the people. A true revolutionary will not kill even an ant, much less a human being."

Evidently, under contemporary influences Nanak Singh has made socialism his ideal, but under the Gandhian influence he is a votary of non-violent revolution.

In *Suman Kanta*, Nanak Singh has used the epistolary method. The whole story is told through letters written to each other by two girl-friends, Suman and Kanta.

Suman had just passed her middle school examination when her parents give her in marriage to one Ram Prakash of Kangra. But like many husbands in Nanak Singh's novels, Ram Prakash

turns out to be a bad character. Earlier he had ruined a girl Mohini and then refused to marry her. And when Mohini had got married to another man, Ram Prakash had him murdered. Meanwhile he gets Mohini pregnant and blackmails her to make her younger sister, Indira, his mistress.

With Suman's help, Sita Ram, Mohini's brother, marries Indira off. Mohini is sent by Suman to her widowed aunt, where she gives birth to Ram Prakash's daughter.

Coming to know of these things, Ram Prakash hurls baseless accusations against Suman and starts to ill-treat her. When Kanta gets to learn of Suman's predicament, she writes to her exhorting her to face her scoundrel of a husband with courage. This challenge proves effective, and Suman discards her earlier fears.

Prem Parkash, Kanta's brother, on learning of Suman's situation, comes to Kangra and meets his friend Tulsi Das who is a magistrate there. Ram Prakash is arrested and sent to jail. He is later released on a bail of twenty thousand rupees. Ram Prakash is then made to admit his crime, and to transfer to Suman half his property, worth about a hundred and fifty thousand rupees.

Prem Prakash comes to Mohini's rescue by marrying her. Kanta is married to Jainendra, a student of Ram Prakash. Ram Prakash has asked Suman's forgiveness and come to the right path. Thus, everything is set right in the end.

In *Adam Khor* (The Man-Eater, 1954), Nanak Singh depicts the conflict between feudalism, capitalism and socialism in India, in his own way. The seed of socialism had perhaps sprouted in Nanak Singh during his stay in Prit Nagar. In *Piar di Duniya* and *Garib di Duniya* he had refrained from owning the socialist creed, and had gone rather further than Gandhism in trying to settle the capital-labour conflict on the pleasant basis of Gurbakhsh Singh's concept of equable love (*sahij priti*). Though his viewpoint is Gandhian socialist, he has made Sukhbir, the hero, speak with awareness of the nature of class war. In *Adam Khor* he goes even further. He writes in the introduction, "The root cause of all conflicts is economic inequality. So long as exploitation persists, no part of the world can live in peace."

Thakur Singh, a factory-owner of Ludhiana, is issueless. His lust throws him into the arms of Chintamani, whose father, a foreman in his factory, is a profligate, and ill-treats the workers,

To get rid of him for his own reasons, Thakur Singh engages Shingara Singh whose hirelings finish the entire Chintamani family.

Shingara Singh is a scion of a family of Patiala State. His father, Buta Singh, had two wives. From his first wife he had two sons, and one from the second, Shingara Singh whose wife Sulochana came of a rich family and had brought a large dowry. They had hardly been married a month, when Buta Singh was shot dead by an opponent, whose companions Buta Singh had got apprehended in a criminal case, resulting in their being hanged.

In those days the Hyderabad State was a scene of disorder because Communists had made tenants occupy the owners' lands that they tilled in about five hundred villages. Shingara Singh had joined the additional police force recruited by the State to suppress the disorders. He had been wounded in action and lost a leg for which reason he was pensioned off. At home his brothers made his lot equally hard. He has to leave home again and come to Ludhiana in search of livelihood. But at Ludhiana he has taken to thieving. On one occasion he gets caught redhanded and is badly beaten up.

Overcome with shame, Shingara did not return home. Late in the evening Sulochana went out to search for him, and came across Pritpal Singh, adopted son of Thakur Singh. He also joined Sulochana in her search. When they failed to find Shingara Singh anywhere, they came to the house of Amar Kaur, the deserted wife of Thakur Singh. Pritpal had quarrelled with Thakur Singh over this and was living with her. Amar Kaur becomes very sympathetic towards Sulochana and occasionally sends provisions to her house.

It was through Amar Kaur that Shingara Singh had come into Thakur Singh's employ. After he had murdered Chintamani, Thakur Singh sent him to Poona to get an artificial leg fitted. But he is recalled from Poona even before the artificial leg is fitted on him. One night he is so drenched with liquor that he fetches Sulochana to satisfy Thakur Singh's lust. But Sulochana is made of sterner stuff. She snatches Thakur Singh's revolver, and pointing it at him makes him confess to all his crimes and evil deeds.

Now Sulochana takes Shingara Singh to a revolutionary's

house. Bharati, the revolutionary, Sulochana and Pritpal try hard to brainwash Shingara Singh but all in vain. Shingara Singh goes to his village with a gun, kills both his brothers and in the end shoots himself. The repentent Thakur Singh, on his part, entrusts everything to Pritpal who has under the influence of Bharati, forsworn violence and accepted the non-violent way of struggle. Pritpal then marries Sulochana.

Incidentally, Bharati is an old fighter of the Telangana action, but accepting the advice of the elderly Sundar Lal he has given up violence in favour of a constitutional programme.

Later novels show a decline in Nanak Singh's art. In *Nasur* (The Running Sore) he reverts to his old theme, prostitution. Amaro, wife of a tenant, Chetu Ram, is abducted by a friend of the landlord, an official in the irrigation department in complicity with Iqbal Singh. Buffeted hither and thither, she becomes a prostitute and gives birth to a daughter Shil Bala who is also obliged to become a prostitute in circumstances similar to her mother's. Mangat Ram, Amaro's son by Chetu Ram, driven from post to pillar, comes to Dehra Dun and marries Shil Bala. Amaro happens to go to her sister's village and meets Mangat Ram. Learning from her that he has married his half-sister, Mangat Ram becomes insane. In the introduction to this novel, Nanak Singh strikes a heroic note of challenging the sense of propriety of conservative, tradition-bound people.

In *Sangam* (Junction) Nanak Singh takes up another theme offensive to traditional decency. Lalita and Tarika are sisters. Lalita is married to a rich merchant Kundan Lal and Tarika to a modestly paid government servant Balraj. Lalita leaves her husband Kundan Lal, who had seduced Tarika when on a visit to them at Delhi. Tarika was also not unwilling for she was bitterly dissatisfied with her unsuccessful husband, Balraj. Lalita goes away with Balraj, partly to avenge Kundan Lal and partly because Balraj has written to her giving a hint of his intention to commit suicide. In Panjab, sexual relations with a sister-in-law are not taboo.

In self-justification, Nanak Singh writes, "Under the sway of revenge, one can hardly distinguish between moral and immoral, or proper and improper. Revenge knows only to destroy whatever comes in its way. This sentiment may in many cases make one strike against a rock and be crushed to smithereens, but

sometimes it may succeed. However, we cannot turn a blind eye to the conditions giving rise to this sentiment. From this aspect the resentment rising in Lalita's heart can perhaps be called improper and anti-social. But when we look at Lalita's conduct with far-sighted sympathy, she will certainly appear to us to be blameless."

In the two novels, *Banjar* (Barren Land) and *Pujari* (The Priest), Nanak Singh takes the background of Hindu-Sikh tension in the decade after Independence, reminiscent of the Hindu-Muslim tension before. He writes, "After a space of forty years, I see the same phenomenon being repeated. My attention rests on 1947, about three decades ago; the decayed and rotten corpse has come out of its grave and clings to the living body of the present."

The story of *Banjar* relates to events of 1955, when there was widespread controversy about Pure Panjab (i.e. it should include Panjabi-speaking areas) and Maha Panjab (which should include Haryana and Delhi which had sizeable Panjabi-speaking populations). The protagonists of one claimed that the speech of Haryana was a dialect of Panjabi and those of the other that both were dialects of Hindi. The hero, Badri Nath, a protagonist of Maha Panjab, is a writer. But for all his efforts he has not been able to scrape together enough money to get his daughter married. He finds employment as an editor of a paper which advocates Hindi sectarianism and Maha Panjab. The owner, Tufan, makes enough money, but Badri Nath can save little out of his salary of two hundred and fifty rupees. One day he pilfers some money out of the newspaper's earnings for the betrothal ceremony of his daughter, Menaka. For this he is caught and jailed.

Badri Nath had once adversely criticised a young Panjabi writer Dipak's book, *Nava Bharat* (New India). On the other hand, Menaka is an admirer of Dipak and a friend and school-mate of his sister Vinod. When Dipak offers to bail out Badri Nath, the latter refuses.

Menaka and Dipak resolve to marry. When she discloses her intentions to her mother, she is pleased, because the boy to whom Menaka was already betrothed had been married by his parents to another girl Tarika, who is also a friend of Menaka. Menaka writes to her father in jail to apprise him of these

developments. Badri Nath who has come to appreciate the reality gives his consent.

When the Panjab is divided into two parts, Panjabi-speaking and Hindi-speaking, Tufan is deprived of his occupation and leaves the Panjab. Badri Nath is released from jail for want of proof of his defalcation.

At this juncture, Dipak takes his mother, who has gone blind, to an eye hospital in Bombay. Menaka comes to live with Vinod who is presumably left alone in the absence of her brother and mother. There is a mulberry bush in the house which has gone dry. Menaka irrigates it with four pails of water daily, with the result that it sprouts again and simultaneously Dipak's mother regains her sight. In the end Dipak and Menaka are joined in marriage.

In *Pujari* Nanak Singh presents his hero, Ram Prakash Bhagat, after his preceptor Gyani Bagh Singh of Peshawar. When the eminent musician, Vishnu Digambar, comes to Amritsar in 1931, Pandit Ram Prakash becomes his disciple, and according to his Guru's teaching he undertakes to unite the people of the Panjab, divided by religion, in a community of culture through music. Vishnu Digambar has advised him that Gurubani is the very stuff of music and Pandit Ram Prakash Bhagat becomes devoted to Gurubani.

During the disorders of 1947, Ram Prakash Bhagat comes across a girl, Sunita, of his neighbourhood beaten up to near death by bad characters. He brings her home. Thanks to his devoted care and the effect of Gurubani music, the girl regains complete physical and mental health.

Sunita is the daughter of Ram Chand, owner of large orchards in Jhelum. In the disorders of 1947, some Muslim orchard-owner of Jhelum, had brought her and her father along with their belongings and jewellery to a camp for evacuees, from where the two had come to Amritsar. At Amritsar, Ram Chand was killed by rioters, while trying to save some Muslims. The girl had become insane in consequence.

When Sunita turns eighteen in 1957, Bhagat Ram is worried about her marriage. Here Nanak Singh introduces a young man, Channan Singh, whose story is even stranger than Sunita's. A shopkeeper, Sangat Ram of Valtoha, Amritsar district, and his wife Radha had died, leaving behind an infant boy, Channan.

A Sikh friend of Sangat Ram, Nahar Singh and his wife, Guro who have no issue of their own, take care of Channan. Channan Singh matriculates but fails to find a job. For some time he becomes a milkman, but this does not bring him enough to live upon. Then falling into bad company he begins to distil and sell illicit liquor. Once he is caught but somehow escapes being imprisoned.

Then he goes to Amritsar to a friend Brijindar Singh for help. Brijindar's father Shamsher Singh is a rich smuggler, and is contesting elections to the legislative assembly. Brijindar Singh at once employs Channan Singh as an election worker and gives him an advance of five hundred rupees. In the elections Hindu-Sikh tension erupts into violence and one day Channan Singh hits Bhagat Ram Prakash with a lathi and wounds him. A few days later Channan Singh receives similar treatment at the hands of some Hindu young men and is brought in a precarious condition to the house of none other than Bhagat Ram Prakash. There he is given adequate care and gets well. At the same time he comes to love and marry Sunita. Channan Singh's foster-parents join the happy occasion but just at that time Bhagat Ram Prakash breathes his last.

In *Astik Nastik* (Theist and Atheist), Nanak Singh shows that goodness and badness are not associated with belief and disbelief in God.

The theists in this novel are of two kinds. Swaran Singh, a rich factory-owner, has three daughters before a son is born to him and he and his family believe that this piece of luck has come to them through the grace of Sant Paramindar Singh.

Sant Paramindar Singh pretends to have given up eating cereals and collects a large amount of money from people to start an *ashram* or house of charity. But he develops illicit relations with his maid-servant Ambo. When some people issue posters to condemn Sant Paramindar Singh for such acts, Swaran Singh replies with posters of calumny against those people. But later when Sant Paramindar Singh fails to render help to Swaran Singh when he is in a difficulty, he also turns against Sant Paramindar Singh.

Raj Singh, a bank clerk and a friend of Swaran Singh is a believer of the right kind, who one night saves Ambo from plunging to death from a hill when she finds herself pregnant

by Sant Paramindar Singh. One day in the course of one of his discussions with Swaran Singh he argues: "There is no doubt that you have discarded personal comforts and pleasures and helped in starting Sant Paramindar Singh's house of charity and done many other acts of merit; but how do you compare yourself with an engineer who is a materialist and an atheist, but has devoted many years of labour to the Bhakra Nangal Project, which has brought under irrigation ten million acres of hitherto barren land, and given two million kilowatts of electricity? In this way, as a consequence of the labour of an unbeliever, grain has become available to millions of the Indian people, thousands of villages and towns have been illuminated with electricity and numerous factories have been set up providing employment to thousands of the hitherto unemployed. Now compare a believer like yourself with one whom you call an unbeliever and say whose devotion will be honoured in the court of God." Here Nanak Singh assumes that scientists are all unbelievers.

Chhalava (The Tempter) is the story of a carpenter, Bhajan Singh, who has the Faustian ambition to grow rich. He has two sons, Harbans and Jaswant. After passing the middle school examination, Harbans finds employment as an accountant-clerk at a brick kiln. Married to Narindar, the only child of Anup Singh, he goes to live at his father-in-law's house. His parents as well as Harbans have high expectations from Anup Singh which are dashed when, Anup Singh's wife gives birth, against all hope, to a son. Harbans Singh leaves his father-in-law's house after stealing a good amount of jewellery and other valuables.

The other son, Jaswant, is a worker in ivory, with much artistic talent. His work wins awards and prizes in exhibitions. His friend Ram Prakash organises an ivory-workers' guild quite successfully. Bhajan Singh now shifts his hopes to Jaswant. Expecting monetary help from him, he begins to build a house. But Jaswant Singh also does not come up to his father's expectations. In the midst of his difficulties, Bhajan Singh takes to smuggling which brings him some comfort.

Harbans Singh proves as ungrateful to his father as he has proved to his father-in-law. Not out of holy zeal for honesty but out of sheer jealousy he informs the police against Bhajan Singh who is deprived of all the wealth he has made by smuggling. Bhajan Singh cannot bear the shock and dies. Jaswant,

the younger son, brings his mother to live with him at Delhi where he works.

In *Ik Mian Do Talwaran* (Two Swords in One Scabbard), Nanak Singh tries his hand at writing a historical novel. He takes for his hero Kartar Singh Sarabha, and provides him with a fictitious heroine. Many of the events through which Kartar Singh Sarabha passes are historical. But Nanak Singh also invents fictitious events concerning Kartar Singh Sarabha's life. He makes him marry his imaginary heroine in his condemned prisoner-well.

However, Nanak Singh has made the story emotionally powerful and what is still more admirable, presented village life in West Panjab under British rule in the beginning of the twentieth century with a rare verisimilitude.

The imaginary part of the story revolves around the life of the family of Sukhdev Singh Sodhi, which is typically feudal, both temporally and spiritually. The comfort and dignity of Sodhi Sukhdev Singh's life depend upon the offerings of his disciples, a circle that has for generations venerated and even worshipped the Sodhi family because they are descended from a family of the Sikh Gurus. He is also a recipient of State patronage.

Nanak Singh has given in this novel an impressive portrayal of the Sodhi's ancestral pride and the blind faith of his disciples, with its overtones of hypocrisy on one side and degenerate ignorance on the other. In describing degradation of the feudal class under the British, Nanak Singh has surpassed his earlier successes in this field. The feudal castle of the Sodhis of Hasanpur, the Thakurdwara (Hindu temple) of Chak Javid, both Sodhi Sukhdev Singh and the Nath custodian of the Hindu temple, and the religious folds of both, are veritable embodiments of the fallen state of Panjab of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The events from the life of Kartar Singh and his comrades' heroic deeds are described with an emotional power that carries conviction. The ignominy of the life of Sodhi Sukhdev Singh is, however, adequately offset by the heroism of his son Raghu and daughter Biri. But Biri's exploit in meeting Kartar Singh Sarabha in his death-cell the night before his execution and going through a symbolic marriage ceremony with him, and then going to Bhalawal and shooting dead Kartar Singh's bet-

rayar, Risaldar Ganda Singh, are a little too much even for romantic fiction.

Ik Mian Do Talwaran is a *tour de force* in which Nanak Singh has taken for his hero one who does not believe in non-violence, but is a votary of armed insurrection. In almost all his other novels, Nanak Singh either manages a non-violent revolution through remorse in the hearts of his villains or by making the children of the villains his heroes. But in this novel, the story, even in the fictional part, remains realistic.

In his next novel, *Koi Haria But Rahio Ri* (A Rare Plant Has Stayed Green) Nanak Singh seems to be attempting a novel that should present the social reality of post-Independence India in as many aspects as he had done in *Chitta Lahu* about forty years earlier when the struggle for independence from British rule had assumed near-revolutionary dimensions.

The span of time covered by *Koi Haria But Rahio Ri*, however, extends from a period earlier than that of *Chitta Lahu*. The story starts with the pitiable antics of a petty shopkeeper, Sauni, to earn a living. He is a vendor of secondhand wares in a cantonment, where he has rented a room for his shop at two or three rupees a month. His wares are old china cups, teapots, shoes and socks, that the servants and orderlies of British army officers pilfer from their masters' houses and sell to him at throw-away prices. Sauni makes good profits on these transactions, but because he mostly sells stolen goods, he is sometimes apprehended by the police. Of course, his misdeeds are not too serious for the venality of the police officials. Sauni's business prospers and he takes to purchasing and selling more substantial and costlier wares like telephone wires, iron girders, and other heavy goods, on the same old basis. He brings goods stolen from government stores and sells them back to government offices at a profit. As he grows prosperous he begins to be called Lala Sawan Mal, but to please his British army customers he assumes the surname of Loyal.

After Independence, in keeping with the political temper, he drops the surname Loyal and becomes Sawan Mal Chauhan, the last being a suitable modification of his *gotra* name, Chona.

When he becomes as rich as he could have wished, he is struck with the vanity of building a big mansion as a suitable indicator of his wealth. For this purpose he manages to acquire

in the centre of the cantonment bazar a site belonging to an old widow, Kishni, by first killing her and then affixing her thumb impression on the deed of transfer. Nobody gets to know of this lecherous crime, excepting Rulia, son-in-law of Kishni working as a blacksmith in faraway Assam. But he can do nothing. Later Sawan Mal's own son, Yatish, comes to know the secret through Rupa, daughter of Rulia who comes to work as a mason in the construction of Lala Sawan Mal's mansion. Rupa and Rulia are living in the out-house of this mansion. Yatish also comes to know that Rulia is the old widow's son-in-law.

Yatish is so shocked at the villainy of his father that he leaves the house without taking anything from the old man's ill-earned wealth. Rulia and Rupa go with him.

They come to live in a *serai* in a town, where Rulia marries his daughter to Yatish, and goes back to Assam. This device of the oppressor's son marrying the daughter of the oppressed is a favourite theme with Nanak Singh.

Now Yatish has a hard time. Though adequately educated and experienced in business, he fails to get suitable employment. He tries his hand at tea-packing, selling ice-cream and then shopkeeping, but meets with failure everywhere. In the end Yatish falls ill, contracts tuberculosis and dies. Rulia comes to look after him but too late. His father and mother never come to his aid.

Thus, Nanak Singh has portrayed the tragedy of the life of the common man in Independent India. Nanak Singh seems to have made in this novel an inventory of all the crimes characteristic of a developing country, and found that only a rare plant in the garden of India has remained green.

This is the last of Nanak Singh's works, who died in 1971 at the ripe age of seventy-four.

6

The Short Stories

Along with his novels Nanak Singh's short stories may be placed in the sentimental school of fiction. Like his novels, too, the short stories have, apart from the manifold oppression of women in our society, a few other recurring themes and patterns, as love between young men and women from different strata of life which fails to make them happy; a mother's more or less excessive love for her sons; the extraordinary humanity of some persons during communal riots; the poverty of teachers, writers and artists and the mental anguish that is also their lot.

Many of these stories are narrated in the first person and thus cannot escape the naivety of sentiment and didacticism. An omnibus collection of these stories is available under the simple title *Merian Kahanian* (My Stories), published some two years after his death.

The first story in this collection, "Midhe Hoe Phul" (Trampled Flowers) is the tragic story of a young woman who is seduced by a Sikh preacher whom the narrator has held in high esteem. The young woman becomes pregnant and writes letter after letter to the preacher to regularise their relationship by marrying her, but to no avail. Ultimately when the child is born, she throws it in front of a hospital from where it is retrieved by the nurses of the hospital and kept in a room under indifferent care. The young woman who has meanwhile lots

her wits, tries to climb the walls of the hospital to have a look at her baby, but is shooed away by the chowkidar. This goes on for a number of days. One day the narrator, who has been going to the hospital daily to enquire after his preacher friend's wife lying seriously ill there, brings the half-mad young woman to his house. There he finds from a small bundle with her the love letters of a man who is none other than his preacher friend. And the concluding remark of the narrator is: Do those who drink only filtered water drink blood without caring to filter it?

In "Akhirli Rishm" (The Last Ray), the narrator, Amarnath happens to pass through the red-light district of Lahore and is tempted, by the comments of a group of sight-seers, to visit one of the prostitutes to know what chain of circumstances had led her into it. When he does go to meet one he is soon persuaded to ask her, who comes of a Brahmin family, if she would care to return to respectability by marrying him. She is surprised at the proposal but after some hesitation accepts it. Chandramukhi, for that is her name, proves a very good and obedient wife. But his social circle thoroughly disapproves of this action of Amarnath. When his maternal uncle hears of it, he withdraws his invitation to his son's marriage. But the worst that happens is that some three of his friends one evening come to his house in his absence and make demands on Chandramukhi to satisfy their lust, for they think that, used to a prostitute's life, she would not say no. But Chandramukhi does not oblige them and they leave saying that soon they would remove Amarnath from their path and oblige her to go back to the red-light district. Chandramukhi discloses all this to Amarnath but is not satisfied with Amarnath's assurances and one day in his absence goes out and drowns herself in the river.

In "Inam" (Prize) this oppression shows a different aspect. Prem Nath boasts of his ability to write a story that should express the extreme plight of a woman suspected of infidelity by her husband. For this purpose, he decides to make his wife the guinea-pig. In the story that he writes he shows the hero much distressed by the infidelity of his wife Ram Piari. When she asks him the reason for his depression, he attributes it to her misdeeds. And when she protests he calls her *badakar* or wicked. At this stage of writing the story, Amarnath decides to make use of his wife, Saran Kaur, to probe further the mind of a wife

thus unjustly accused of faithlessness. Going home, he lies down in his bed, pretending to be much overwrought. When his wife, Saran Kaur, asks him why he is so distraught, he uses the same words that he has made the husband in the story use. But immediately after this, he feels the iniquity of his words, and thinks of getting up and going to console Saran Kaur, who has withdrawn to the kitchen. But he sees a blaze of fire rise. Saran Kaur has burnt herself by sprinkling kerosene oil on her body and lighting a match.

Another favourite theme of social criticism is the hypocrisy of people with moral and altruistic pretensions.

In "Inami Kahani" (Prize Story), the hypocritical role is assigned to a writer, Pramod who has written a story for a prize competition and is sure of winning the prize. He is going to Delhi in a first-class compartment of a train in which he is all alone. The hero of the story within the story is a young man who finds service with a merchant but refuses to collaborate with him in writing false accounts. For his refusal he is dismissed. In utter despair, he steals ten thousand rupees from his employer's shop, but is caught and brought before the judge. When he is questioned he reveals that his master has been evading income-tax in thousands and lakhs by fabricating false accounts. Pramod reads this story to himself he goes into an ecstasy over it. He places it in a small box that he is carrying. At this point another person enters the compartment, puts something under Pramod's nose to make him unconscious and makes away with the small box. This small box not only contains the draft copy of Pramod's story but also a large quantity of smuggled gold. Pramod does not only write short stories, but also smuggles gold to enrich himself.

"Vidhawa Ashram" (Widows' Home) reveals another type of hypocrisy. A gentleman has organised a home for widows whom he professes to give shelter and some education after which he arranges their marriages and the bridegrooms make handsome donations to the Ashram. In the story, the so-called widow is a young woman of about sixteen whom the manager of the home has abducted. But in this case, the police has come to know of his subterfuge and one day a policeman in disguise comes to the home as a potential customer. Just when the girl is shown to him, he takes out of his pocket a warrant of arrest

and thus the hypocrite receives his due punishment.

The device of irony is used in producing more varied effects also. In "Prabhat Da Supna" (The Morning Dream), also told in the first person, Kirpa Ram, a teacher and colleague of the narrator is given the nickname of Radio by his other colleagues because he is a great talker. But what the narrator finds remarkable in him is his desperate optimism. On every Sunday after pay-day he and the narrator go on a spree which consists of no more than a long walk, some home-cooked refreshments at a pleasant spot in the country-side and a movie in the evening. But on one of these picnic days, Kirpa Ram is more jubilant than usual, and the reason, as he tells the narrator, is a pleasant dream he has had that morning before getting up. It is Kirpa Ram that has won a lottery of five thousand rupees. With the firm faith that morning dreams always come true and getting the narrator to suspend disbelief, he orders a tonga to take them out. He stops it in front of the Royal Hotel where they consume snacks worth five rupees. Coming out of the hotel and jumping again in the tonga, he takes the narrator to the bazaar to make a few purchases. When they return to Kirpa Ram's house, he has no more than three rupees left in his purse from his month's salary. The tonga fare has amounted to three quarters of a rupee more, which the narrator has to pay out of his pocket. Next morning when Kirpa Ram comes to school, he brings with him a registered notice demanding payment of an overdue bill. But there is no sign of alarm or sadness on Kirpa Ram's face. And he will not admit that morning dreams can prove false. Perhaps this last Sunday's dream had come a few moments earlier or later than exactly at the right time of morning. And when annoyed at his incorrigible optimism, the narrator asks him what he will eat during the month, his reply is light-hearted. He will "eat" his wife's rebukes and insults and the wife 'his head'.

Teachers are the recurring butts of Nanak Singh humour. In "Adarshvadi" (The Idealist), Satpal, the youngest child of a family, grows up without care for earning a living. And in this state he is married and brings home a wife. Soon the parents are no more and Satpal no longer receives the same degree of indulgence from his brothers and sisters-in-law. He is given his share of the patrimony and left to fend for himself. And yet he is far from being disillusioned. He would often tell his young wife

how he would bring up his children, not like other people who let them grow on their own. But when a son is born to them, Satpal is faced with the problem not only of bringing him up in his ideal way but of making a living, for the patrimony is fast dwindling. After applying in many places for a job he gets a teacher's job at seventy rupees a month. In Nanak Singh's time seventy rupees was not such a paltry sum as today, but it was not a good salary either. After ten years of marriage, Satpal becomes the father of six children, with the seventh on the way. He finds life hard. One day at school he asks his pupils to read out their lessons to him. One after another the boys read: "Children, you are the nurselings of a free country and you have to make its future. . . . Government in India will not let anyone in the country go hungry or unclad. The day is not far when rivers of milk and butter will flow in India. Children, you must equip yourself with the wealth of learning and adorn the chairs left vacated by Gandhi, Subhash and Nehru."

Everyone of the students receives a harsh rebuke from Satpal, and in the end, dismissing the class, he asks the head-master to give him leave for the rest of the day as he is not feeling well.

Writers and artists as a class are another favourite target of Nanak Singh's humour and irony. Sukhvir Singh in "Lachhami Puja" (Worship of Lakshmi) is a poet and artist who, according to the writer, is blessed by the goddess of learning, Saraswati, but ignored by the goddess of wealth, Lachhami. The actual vocation in which Sukhvir Singh is engaged is making clay toys, combining art with a more worldly employment. Such artists are in good demand on festive occasions like Diwali. Sukhvir has many orders on his hands on a Diwali day, to make the figures of the goddess of wealth in Italian plastic. But precisely at this time he is requested by the editor of a local magazine to contribute a poem for its Diwali issue. Sukhvir Singh knows that this request is only an interruption in his more gainful work, but he complies with it in deference to the claims of poetry. To make things worse for him, his right arm is stiff with a painful sore. But he goes on making the idols. Having worked till late at night and, feverish with fatigue, he goes to bed where he falls into a delirium, in turns praying to the goddess for gifts and rebuking her for being so cruel towards him. The result is that he can complete neither the statuettes nor the poem, and the

customers go away displeased.

"Her Pher" (Trickery) is the story of the wife of a novelist who, searching for a pen-knife for her son, happens to put her hand in her husband's pocket and finds to her surprise some slips on which is written a very sentimental love-letter. She suspects her husband of deceiving her, but wants to clear it up with him. She remains distraught the whole day, even when some women of the neighbourhood call upon her. In the evening when the novelist comes home, he is much distressed to find the slips missing. The whole incident ends in happy laughter.

About artists and writers Nanak Singh sometimes loses grip of his ironical commonsense and falls into sentimentality. In "Vishwasghat" (Betrayal) Dipak is a very good poet, but physically small and ugly. Impressed by his poetry, Rup Kumari, daughter of a rich man, Rai Sahib Din Dayal, who is a first-class magistrate, falls in love with him and invites him to Dalhousie to receive her love and all. He speaks of it to his friend, Mohinder, a handsome young man. He proposes that Mohinder should go to Dalhousie and pretend to be Dipak and carry Dipak's poems with him. Mohinder obliges and at Dalhousie he lives with Rup Kumari as Dipak for over two months. When Mohinder returns from Dalhousie, he finds Dipak more wretched than ever before. On the next day when he goes to see him, he finds him lying dead and a letter addressed to him by Rup Kumari who evidently could not wait for even a day of Mohinder's (Dipak's) departure. Dipak has died of heart failure.

"Maut di Antim Pauri Ton" (From the Last Step to Death) presents again in a melodramatic way a refugee girl, Lalita, who having lost her well-to-do parents in the 1947 carnage in Pakistan, comes to an Indian town and is given shelter by an Indian family related in some way to her. There she resumes her studies and comes into contact with Kailash who falls in love with her. Lalita is not unresponsive but when Kailash asks her to marry him, she tells him that she can do so only after getting permission of Vimal, the young man of the family who has given her shelter. Kailash is led to believe that she is in love with Vimal who is a close friend of his, too. So he thinks of committing suicide to get out of Vimal's way. But then he decides upon a meet in which there will be two glasses, one containing poison and the other a syrup of exactly the same appearance.

And Kailash will have the first choice. In the meet Kailash chooses the glass supposed to contain the poison and drinks it. Vimal is now fully convinced of Kailash's love and tells him that in neither of the glasses is there any poison and that Lalita is like a sister to him and he will gladly give her in marriage to Kailash.

"Supanian di Kabar" (The Graveyard of Dreams) is an ironical account of marriage resulting from youthful love of a rich man's daughter, Ranjana, with Nindar, son of a poor family, studying in the same college. After college the young man fails to find a decent job; the only job that he lands is a clerkship in the department of rationing (Civil Supplies) at seventy rupees a month. They live in Nindar's mother's house.

When Nindar's mother dies, Ranjana persuades him to accept a better paid job in her brothers' factory. But it is humiliating for Nindar to take orders from his wife's brothers and accept their nagging criticism. His relations with Ranjana deteriorate. Ultimately, one night Nindar leaves the sleeping Ranjana and returns to his parental home. Ranjana realises the mental agony of her husband and to the surprise of her brothers, returns to Nindar's house. Thus, love between rich and poor proves to be the graveyard of romantic dreams and hopes.

The problem of a writer is tackled in a different way in "Moti nu Mulamma" (A Gold-washed Pearl). Pearl stands for a dramatist who is poor but persists in writing till a play of his is published by a magazine of repute and also succeeds on the stage. This brings him a job at rupees six hundred a month (a decent sum again in Nanak Singh's days) in a film company. He is asked to write a play with a plot powerful by turns in pathos and humour. He tries but finds it hard to write to the formula laid down for him. And then he hits at the idea of plagiarising from a successful English film. This story has good success on the screen. But then one day he receives a letter from one who has detected the plagiarism and soundly reproaches him for it. The writer, the pearl, is so touched that he does not go to the company's office to receive his pay but instead rings up to say that he is not worth his salary nor is the salary worth his art. The plagiarised success is a false wash on the genuine pearl, the writer.

In three stories Nanak Singh takes up the question of Hindu-

Muslim riots which were a normal feature of life in the Panjab before Independence. People of goodwill would generally point to the core of goodness that existed in the hearts of both Hindus and Muslims which they alleged was made ineffective by political and other tensions. In "Rab Apne Asali Rup Vich" (God in His True Shape), the Hindu festival of Dussehra and Muslim festival of Muharram happen to fall on the same day one year and it is feared that the tension caused by communal pride and intolerance may culminate in rioting and killing. So both sides make preparations for offence as well as defence. The procession of Muharram results in the murder of a Hindu youth. A Moulvi who has been alerting Muslims to be ready to face the Hindus, happening to pass that way, hears the laments of the Hindu's wife in the funeral procession and his heart is haunted as he goes home. Repentance fills his heart so that when the next day a procession of Hindus following the tableau of Rama and Lachhman passes by his mosque, he throws bouquets of flowers on them. This produces a marvellous effect and from Hindus and Muslims both arise sudden shouts of goodwill and fraternisation.

In "Sunehri Jild" (Golden Cover), a Sikh takes to a Muslim binder an old and tattered copy of the Quran. He wants it to be bound in a golden cover. The binder is surprised and asks the Sikh if the book belongs to him. When the Sikh says that it belongs to his daughter it only heightens the binder's surprise. Ultimately, the Sikh tells him that during the Hindu-Muslim riots about five years earlier a Muslim old man was fatally wounded while saving his wife and shop from Hindus. He had left behind a daughter of ten and the Sikh has brought her up and the Quran is meant for her.

"Jadon Sade Vich Insaan Pragat Hunda Hai" (When the Human Emerges out of Us) is the story of a Sikh soldier who goes on a patrol on one of the hills in Kashmir to find out about the tribal raiders who are said to have penetrated into Indian territory. As it happens, he alone is left from his party of ten, the other nine having perished in the snow. In a state of stupor he comes upon another seemingly dead man, a Panjabi Muslim leading a band of the raiders who also have perished in the snow. Deriving strength from his bottle of rum and packet of biscuits which he shares with the Muslim, the Sikh brings the Muslim to

his camp. In the night he helps the Muslim escape, for which he is cashiered and sent home without pension. But he is not sorry for it.

In "Lash di Tasvir" (The Picture of a Corpse), the narrator tells of an incident which shows again the human sympathy that lies at the core of our hearts. The narrator is invited to dinner by a newly married friend, Jairam Singh. There he finds on the wall the picture of a corpse with a rifle by it. The corpse is that of a Pathan who had been killed by his compatriots for shielding and helping escape the wife of a Hindu from a cave in which they had kept her as a hostage for ransom.

Hill stations figure in some of the stories, where the sentiment is comparatively healthy. "Snowfall" tells of an incident connected with the hill station of Dalhousie. Here he relates the story of a government official who goes to Dalhousie in the month of December to see the snowfall there. In those days the buses would not go further into the hills than Banikhet, some five miles down. The government official getting down at Banikhet has a large bedding in which he has wrapped some other articles also. Looking around he is able to get hold of a coolie and engages him to carry his load. The story ends with the death of the Coolie a couple of miles to Dalhousie, owing to extreme cold and excessive exertion. The government official is able to get a lift from a military jeep going that way.

"Swarg te Isde Waris" (Paradise and Its Heirs) is the story of a poor Kashmiri boy, Kasim, who works as an errand-boy to a visiting couple staying in a house-boat in the Dal Lake of Srinagar. The boy steals articles from the house-boat, but the visitors have not the heart to blame him. Ultimately, when Kasim is caught after stealing some vials of medicine from a chemist's shop, it turns out that it was he who had stolen the visitors' articles too. But all this he has been doing to save his old father from cold and his ailing sister from death; his father could not buy medicines for her. This sentimentality is quite in character with Nanak Singh's thinking about the petty crimes of the poor as resulting from their poverty.

"Is Maya ke Tin Nam" (Wealth Has Three Names) is again the story of a character in Dalhousie. A man called Mangu, takes the writer to a house which he thinks will suit him. The

rent Mangu agrees on is what the writer could easily pay, though the size of the house gives the impression that the rent should be much higher. It is so because, as the writer says, the beauty and luck of Dalhousie had gone with the British.

In the end it turns out that Mangu is himself the owner of the house and is known to municipal authorities as Lala Mangat Ram on whom occasionally a balliff calls to collect house-tax. Lala Mangat Ram has also suffered in status and respect with the loss of these things by Dalhousie, which is now an out-of-the-way place near the border between India and Pakistan.

"Moh Mai" (Mother's Love) is the story of a Muslim fanatic who goes from Peshawar to Lahore to kill a Sikh leader. He is stopped on the way by a young girl of about twelve who accosts him with a phrase often uttered by small Hindu girls when they ask for gifts on the occasion of the Lohri festival. The phrase, meaning "mother's dear son, give me a mother's love", haunts him even after he has dismissed the girl with contempt. Having gone a few steps he is compelled to return to the girl, gives her a rupee and declares himself her brother. Then he reaches the Sikh leader's house, and overhears the rebuke the girl is being administered for asking a stranger for a gift and then the sound of a slap on the girl's cheek by her father. The Muslim fanatic leaps between the girl and her father and explains everything. Thereafter he organises a society of people dedicated to fostering communal harmony and comes to be known as "Farishta-i-Millat" (Angel of the Community).

In some stories there is a happy blend of idealism and sentiment which is rather original in concept.

"Navan Master" (New Teacher) is the story a schoolmaster who on the first two days of his taking up the job, finds the class of some twenty-two boys uncontrollable, because he wears a woe-begone look. On the third day he decides to tell his sad story to the boys. He has lost not only a flourishing business at Multan during the 1947 killings but his three sons as well. It has taken him over a year to find this petty job for which he is technically not qualified. He has had to beseech the management to give him this job so that his wife who has gone mad because of these misfortunes may be cured. This account so affects the boys that they all offer to call him father and his wife mother.

"Jealousy Cures Jealousy" is another story of the same kind. Lachhami, sore at her husband's infidelity, decides to take poison to end her life. She sends a young girl to bring some arsenic for her from a nearby shop. One of the persons gathered at the shop, a wise old man, gives a hint to the shopkeeper to give the girl a tablet of salt of ammonia. The girl takes it to Lachhami who swallows it and believing it to be poison is taken ill with fright. Just at this moment a young woman, Kunti, the old man's daughter, comes at his bidding to help Lachhami with a supposed antidote. Kunti, advises Lachhami to adopt a stratagem to put her husband right. Accordingly, one day dressed as a youth she comes to Lachhami in her husband's absence and the two exchange romantic sentiments at the moment Lachhami's husband Jai Dayal is expected to return home. Jai Dayal sets upon the young lover with offended pride, and the young man repeats the words that Jai Dayal had spoken to Lachhami, indicating his helplessness as a lover, and when Kunti takes off her disguise, Jai Dayal is filled with shame and puts his arms round Lachhami as an act of repentance and redress.

"Har Badale Moti" (Pearl for a Necklace) is another such web. Santokh Singh and Jamuna are an issueless couple. Stung by a remark by his brother that ultimately his land will come to his nephews, Santokh Singh becomes a recluse and goes to live on the bank of the Ganga, leaving Jamuna to her fate. One day when he goes to take a bath in the Ganga, something soft touches his feet. He finds it to be Jamuna who has plunged into the Ganga to kill herself. Saved providentially in this manner, Jamuna decides to live and persuades her husband to return with her to their village. There she arranges a second marriage for her husband and his second wife bears him a son. This is real comfort to Santokh Singh, of course, but Jamuna also vicariously feels rehabilitated as a step-mother.

In "Bhabi" (Sister-in-law), Malti, a young woman of twenty is without child after four years of marriage. Having no brother of her own she has great affection for her sixteen-year-old brother-in-law, Kanwal. On the other hand, her husband Pandit Balmukand is in his mid-forties. He looks with suspicion at Malti's affection for Kanwal and treats him harshly. Kanwal begins to take part in nationalist politics and becomes a

Congress volunteer. This arouses Balmukand's fears as well. As a result of this tension, Kanwal leaves his brother's house. One day as a procession passes by Malti's window, she learns that it is following a political prisoner, Kanwal Kishor. She goes to the window with a garland to put round Kanwal's neck. Kanwal also stops before the window, comes out of the procession to pay respects to Malti who garlands him. The procession shouts slogans of 'Long Live Malti Devi and Pandit Kanwal Kishor'.

"Bhua" (Aunt) is another story of domestic affection but without the tension that accompanies it in "Bhabi". On the other hand, there is a lot of good humour in it.

In "Vadda Doctor" (Chief Physician) a boy of three, Jagdish, is very fond of playing with puppies and kittens. His father Dina Nath does not like it. So he brings toy animals for his son and drives out a kitten to which Jagdish is deeply attached. The result is that Jagdish falls ill and no medicine has any effect on him. It is only when another kitten happens to come to their house that Jagdish recovers from illness.

Nanak Singh is very sentimental about the maltreatment that orphaned children suffer at the hands of their uncles and aunts. This is the theme of "Rakhri" (Protective Bracelet). Ram Lal, fifteen, and Soma, thirteen, orphaned brother and sister, are living with their deceased father's younger brother and his wife. Ram Lal is made to work as a cook's boy at an eating house while Soma has to slave for her aunt. The aunt is so cruel that on the Rakhri festival she does not allow Soma to tie a rakhi on her brother's wrist, a custom that has the force of ritual in Hindu society. Fed up with this kind of maltreatment at his uncle's home, Ram Lal runs away. In three years there is a complete revolution in the fortunes of the orphaned brother and sister, on the one hand, and their uncle and aunt, on the other. Soma is married in a well-to-do house, and Ram Lal also meets with a lot of luck. Their uncle's business on the other hand fails and their aunt has to serve as a charwoman in other people's houses. On the same festival, after all these years, Ram Lal comes to see his sister who is visiting her aunt. He gives many gifts to her and Soma asks him if he has brought any gift for their aunt. When Ram Lal gives a harsh reply, Soma pleads with him to forgive the aunt for after all they have been brought up by her. She makes over most of her brother's gifts to her aunt and Ram

Lal also falls on his knees to pay respects to his aunt.

Nanak Singh has the kindest of sentiments for mothers. In "Anhera Chan" (Dark Moon) he tells of a blind young man, Chandra Bhan, who, at the age of twenty, is dependent on his mother, Manglan, fifty years of age. One day, while mending the leaking roof in the rain, she catches a chill and sits crying in her fever to think of what will become of her son when she is no more. Chandra Bhan senses her anguish and the next day he goes out selling needles and buttons. Thus, he begins to support himself and his old ailing mother. But before long Manglan dies and left alone in the world, Chandra Bhan goes out and is heard of no more by the people of his street.

Similarly in "Man di Daulat" (Mother's Wealth), Paro, wife of Bhagat Singh, in extreme poverty, dreams that an issueless rich merchant takes away one of her sons to adopt and that her son refuses to go with him and clings to her, crying.

"Arzi" (Law-suit) is a short tale of pure humour. Rame Shah, a village money-lender, decides to file a suit against a cultivator, Bishna, who is not only unable to repay his debt but threatens to use violence. Rame Shah taking the account book with him sets out for the court-town. He does not get on a tonga plying to the town, because he cannot persuade the tongawala to carry him for six pice which is half the usual fare. He decides to make it on foot. He has covered only a short distance when he is obliged by heat and thirst to take rest under the shade of a tree. There he falls into deep sleep and dreams of his debtor Bishna trying to snatch his account book. The book is actually being pulled by a stray calf. Rame Shah comes out of this nightmare when the tongawala returns from the town and wakes him up. Now the time for the court is long past and Rame Shah returns to his village on the same tonga which he had spurned in the morning.

"Namurad" (Stricken of Luck) is the story of a miserable character, Lehna Singh who has not been able to find a wife though he has turned fifty. He has poor eye-sight and suffers from Parkinson's disease. Yet he longs to marry. Young and old make a fool of him over this and once a group of young men decide to play a cruel joke on him. The narrator warns Lehna Singh of this, but Lehna Singh accuses him of being unkind and jealous. When Lehna Singh is cheated of whatever

jewellery and gifts he has arranged for his would-be- bride and comes home disappointed and disillusioned, the narrator involuntarily calls him "Stricken of Luck", an epithet which in his opinion nobody wants to be applied to him.

A more meaningful sentiment characterises the short story, "Insan Haivan" (Man and Beast). The narrator is stranded at a railway station off Rampur in Uttar Pradesh on a cold winter night. The only other passenger there is a local woman with two children of about five and a year-and-a-half respectively. Seeing that she is ill-provided with clothing, he thinks of offering her one of his two blankets. But as soon as the woman sees him, she leaves the place near him and goes with her children to take shelter under a nearby tree. In the meantime a dog with her puppies comes to where he is lying, whom he puts under his blanket. As he wakes up in the morning he muses over the incident which seemed to show how man has grown distrustful of man, while a beast is still trustful.

"Sionk" (White Ant) is the story of Anand Sarup Sethi, once owner of a small flour-mill, who has fallen upon evil days. He finds it hard to pay the rent of the house he lives in. Anand Sarup's father had a house in their ancestral village. He had done something wicked and to save himself from the consequences, he had had to leave the place and has not been heard of for many years. Everybody believed that he had died. At the instance of his wife, Janaki, Anand Sarup sells this house much against his will, and they begin to live well. To establish his right of ownership of that house, Anand Sarup has had to affirm an oath that his father was dead. But he is such a coward that the fear of this lie being exposed gnaws at his heart like white ant. So much so that he comes to suffer from a wasting disease which no physician can diagnose. But just when he seems to be counting his last days, he receives information that his father is dead. This "good" news dispels all his fears and in a few days he recovers.

There is some not so subtle psychology in a story to which Nanak Singh has given the title "Antaryamata" (Clairvoyance), Prof. Jugal Kishore tells of his experiences with a deaf and mute girl Sulekha, daughter of a petty vendor of stationery, on the upper storey of whose shop he used to live when he was a college student. One day as he stepped into their shop to buy a

packet of cigarettes. Sulekha on her own, offered him a packet. This the professor calls his first experience of the deaf and mute girl's clairvoyance. The cigarettes were inferior and not to Jugal Kishore's liking. But when he returned from college, the girl offered him a superior brand of cigarettes. This he calls the girl's second act of clairvoyance.

Similarly, on two other occasions the girl seemed to Jugal Kishore to have read his mind. One day Sulekha's father tells him that he is going out for the night, leaving his daughter in his care. Before going to sleep Sulekha came to his room and, in her sign language tells him that she is afraid of sleeping alone in the shop and if he does not mind she would come and sleep in his room. To this Jugal Kishore makes no objection. Towards the later part of the night, impelled by strong desires, Jugal Kishore decides to approach Sulekha's bed, but to his surprise he finds that the bed on which Sulekha had slept is empty. She had read his intent from his restlessness during the night and quietly left the room along with her bedding while he was asleep.

In the end may be mentioned three stories that are of a religious colour and interest and partake of the nature of myths. In one, "Tin Mandir" (Three Temples) the ruler of a native state during the British period, is like many others of his class, a profligate who has no time from his lecheries for affairs of the state. He has got a woman abducted and brought to his place. He tries all the means at his disposal to seduce her. One day he tries to rape her, but just at that moment a veiled man appears who puts both the bodyguards of the ruler to the sword. In the scuffle both the Raja and the veiled man are seriously wounded, while the woman escapes. The veiled man is none other than Shamsher Singh, husband of the woman, Jagdish Kaur. He is a man in open rebellion against the Raja and enjoys support from the Raja's subjects. When both the Raja and the veiled man get well from their wounds, the veiled man is tried and sentenced to death by hanging.

On the day fixed for the hanging, his wife, leading a force of rebels, appears on the scene. She and her force do not use any weapons, but are able to overpower the Raja's forces, even though many of them are killed and wounded. Jagdish Kaur is among the fatally wounded. The Raja abdicates in favour of his son (who is a friend of his people) and becomes a wandering

mendicant. A temple is raised to the memory of Jagdish Kaur in which her statue is placed for worship and her husband Shamsher Singh becomes the priest of the temple.

"Kaya Kalpa," (Transformation) is the story of Bhumiya, a legendary thief of Dacca, now in Bangladesh, who changes into a saintly person after meeting Guru Nanak, after he had extracted three promises from him: no to tell a lie, not to betray the person whose salt he has eaten, and not to rob the poor.

The last is "Thakurji" (The Lord). Mohina, a Rajput woman of eighteen, fills water in a brass pitcher at the watering place of Raipur and takes it for bathing the idol of the Lord in the temple. On the way a man lying wounded across her path asks for water. She refuses him water for that way the water meant for the bath of the idol will lose its purity. The wounded man retorts that the Lord will not allow such a cruel person to see him. Mohina reaches the temple, but the curse haunts her and she retraces her steps to offer water to the wounded man who is dead by that time. This wounded man was a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh, the Lord of Patna. He was wounded trying to rescue two young maidens from the clutches of two miscreants, as Sohan Das, Mohina's husband, who is a gardener in the Raja's palace, tells her. Now Mohina is filled with intense longing to see the Lord of Patna. Once when Guru Gobind Singh actually visits the Raja of Raipur, circumstances take such a turn that Mohina cannot see the Lord of Patna, for the curse of the Guru's Sikh cannot be averted.

However, the Lord of Patna, knowing of Mohina's repentance and her intense devotion, sends word to the Raja to find a capable gardener for his place at Anandpur and the Raja decides to send Sohan Das who naturally takes Mohina along with him.

There Mohina grows flowers with special care in a special bed to present to the Lord on his next birthday. The day comes, but when Mohina goes to the flower-bed, she is sorely disappointed to find that the flowers have been plucked away. This has been done by a Fakir who has woven a garland of flowers to present to the Lord. But the Lord refuses the gift, for the flowers in it are stolen. Then the Lord asks Mohina to go with him to the garden, where they both will weave garlands from whatever flowers are available.

These three stories illustrate the creed that Nanak Singh follows. He is a Sikh of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh and a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi whose creed of non-violence is the creed of his heroine in 'Tin Mandir', too. On my wonder if Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh and, indeed, the Sikh religion puts so much store by non-violence.

7

Conclusion

Nanak Singh is a novelist of the tradition of Bankim Chandra Chatterji and Sarat Chandra Chatterji of Bengali and Prem Chand of Urdu and Hindi. As he has himself written, when he was in jail as an Akali *satyagrahi*, in the early twenties, he was brought by a fellow-prisoner to read Prem Chand's novels and it became his ambition to work for social reform in the way Prem Chand was doing. It did not take him long to achieve this ambition. After a few years of apprenticeship in the form of writing short and romantic reformist novels, he made his mark in Panjabi literature with *Chitta Lahu* (White Blood) in 1932.

Before him Panjabi literature could claim practitioners of the art of novel only in Bhai Vir Singh, S.S. Charan Singh Shahid and Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid. About a dozen other stray novels were published during this period but none of them can be considered as a major work of literature. Even Bhai Vir Singh and his two contemporaries are novelists with a limited range, whose endeavour was to preach religious and social reform in the Sikh society of their time and the first two confined themselves more or less to writing novels based on the history of the Sikhs. When they come out of this narrow path, it is to preach social reform among the Sikhs, taking their cue from the way of life of contemporary English society and the preachings of the Sikh Gurus as interpreted anew by the Singh Sabha movement.

Nanak Singh was also influenced by the Singh Sabha movement so that he turned from the Hindu religious tradition to Sikhism and changed his name from Hans Raj to Nanak Singh. Subsequently he went to jail as an Akali satyagrahi under the advice of Gyani Bagh Singh.

But he never became a bigoted Sikh and only once in his youth did he join a band of fanatical Sikh young men to beat an unsuspecting Hindu stranger. Gyani Bagh Singh's treatment of the wounded young man not only put Nanak Singh to shame but made him see the enormity of bigotry among the Sikhs as well as the Hindus and the Muslims. Somewhat later his contact with people of religious pretensions lacking in true humanity, affected him powerfully and gave him ample material for novels and short stories, especially in his earlier period.

If one were to make an inventory of themes and motifs in his novels and short stories one would have to begin with the excesses and iniquities wrought on women, orphans and low-caste Hindus, especially those belonging to the scheduled castes, in which the villains are people of the high castes led by hypocritical religious preachers and priests. Widowed Hindu women are presented as becoming prostitutes under this tyranny, as in *Chitta Lahu* (Gurdei), *Kagtan di Beri* (Jamuna), *Dhundale Parchhavan* (Subhadra), *Tutti Vina* (Satya), *Gangajali* (Pratima), *Kati Hoi Patang* (Kesari), *Nasur* (Amaro and Shil Bala). In *Fauladi Phul* and *Adh Khiria Phul* also prostitutes appear as secondary characters. These women have been driven to this way of life by the tyranny of their menfolk, Gurdei by the selfishness of Radha Krishan and Tara Chand, Jamuna by Gopal Singh's allurements, Subhadra by her mother's master, Devindar Singh's profligacy, Satya by Ganga Ram's treachery and Kesari by Brij Mohan's perfidy.

The hypocritical preachers and priests are joined, to their reciprocal benefit, by bad characters, economic exploiters and other self-serving individuals. In this way Nanak Singh portrays the relation between class exploitation and traditional religion. In *Chitta Lahu* the Granthi is a tool in the hands of Pala Singh; in *Fauladi Phul*, the confederates are Mohan Singh, the physician and Uttam Singh, the sectarian journalist; in *Piar di Duniya*, Sadhu Onkar Nath and Seth Prabhu Dayal, in

Manjhdhar, Dr Anand and Mr Shukla, in *Pujari Sant Paramindar Singh* are such villains. Some of the women characters are driven to suicide by their seducers and oppressors, as Gurdei in *Chitta Lahu*; Champa in *Jiwan Sangram*, seduced by Puran Chand, commits suicide in repentance; Raj Kumari in *Love Marriage* commits suicide after seduction and betrayal by Raghunath; Satya in *Tutti Vina* drowns herself when betrayed by Ganga Ram; Pratima in *Gangajali* is similarly betrayed by Prakash and led to suicide; Vina in *Pavittar Papi* dies of grief at the death of Kidar. We can blame Puran Chand also for his wife Usha's death by a fall from a hill in *Jiwan Sangram*; Malti in *Garib di Duniya* tries to commit suicide but is saved by the elderly railway guard; Saroj in *Adh Khiria Phul* drops down dead on the railway platform at being jilted by Kuldip Singh.

The heroic victims are generally widowed women, orphans, women of scheduled castes and other poor classes who become targets not only of economic exploitation and social and religious obscurantism, but also of men's lust. Men who sympathise with these unfortunates earn the displeasure and enmity of their oppressors and suffer indignities and even violence. Bachan Singh in *Chitta Lahu* is one of them.

These men and woman often react to their oppression with violence of an extreme nature and thus an element of melodrama and even tragedy of the Elizabethan type is evoked. Gurdei kills Radha Krishan and her stepson Karam Chand. Sundari consigns Pala Singh and the Granthi to fire before she kills herself. Pushpa shoots the revolutionary Babaji after being disillusioned with his policy of violence. Subhadra kills Naubat Rai who comes to her to satisfy his lust but is found by her to be her father's elder brother.

However, Nanak Singh steps out of this narrow circle and devotes special attention to the profligacy and iniquity of men of wealth and high caste who wrong not only men and women of the lower strata of society but also their own wives. These wives are presented as paragons of virtue and self-sacrificing devotion to their husbands, thus pointing to Nanak Singh's conformity with the traditional code of virtue for the Hindu woman. The towering virtues of these oppressed wives are an unlimited patience with the evil ways of their husbands, stoic

suffering and then a Christian or more appropriately Gandhian forgiveness, returning good for evil. For instance, Usha on her death-bed forgives her husband, Puran Chand. Shashi and her father Prabhakar (*Chitrakar*) forgive Seth Diwarka Das. Suman (*Suman Kanta*) similarly forgives her profligate husband Ram Prakash.

The orphaned children of middle-class families, left to the mercies of their uncles and aunts, are another group of victims of social oppression in Nanak Singh's novels and stories. These orphans are very often brothers and sisters who show unlimited affection and devotion to each other and a Gandhian attitude of forgiveness to their oppressors in the hour of their prosperity and good fortune which is generally accompanied by the oppressors' falling on bad days.

There is a strong streak of middle-class idealism in Nanak Singh's treatment of these themes. Rarely does a novel or story end in tragedy. Mostly tragedy is averted by the change of heart experienced by the oppressor and evil-doer. So far does he go in this direction that even a wicked woman like Jamuna and her accomplice Gopal Singh in *Kagan di Beri* mend their ways. Thakur Singh in *Adam Khor* makes over all his property to Pritpal Singh and Seth Amar Nath in *Garib di Duniya* asks forgiveness from his son Baldev before dying of remorse.

The range of this idealism extends from the narrow domestic field to the political field also that Nanak Singh ventures to scout in his later novels. In some of the novels of his middle period, the turning point in the drift of the stories is provided by idealistic love of the type preached by Gurbakhsh Singh as in *Garib di Duniya* and *Piar di Duniya*. In the novels of the later period the influence of Gandhism is patently visible as in *Manjhdhar* and *Adam Khor*.

In some cases he goes even beyond Gandhism, becoming more akin to Tolstoy. For instance, in *Chitrakar* he makes the hero, Prabhakar, formally marry the girl betrayed after pregnancy by his son, only later to restore her to her normal position as his son's wife. And in *Manjhdhar* Pannya, a woman social worker (a Hindu) submits herself to the sexual desire of Mansur (a Muslim) who would otherwise, in her judgement, fall ill and die of frustration.

Rarely in Nanak Singh's novels does a woman perform an

oppressor's role. Even his prostitutes are more sinned against than sinning, and whenever a woman falls it is not for want of moral fibre or with an exploitative purpose, but under compulsion of one kind or other. Women characters become oppressors only when they are step-mothers like Diali in *Matrai Men* or aunts of orphaned children like Bindro in *Rakhari*.

The role of oppressor in his novels is performed by men whose victims are more often, but not always, women. Men of the poorer classes are only indirectly involved. Thus the major model of oppression is a profligate rich husband victimising his wife or an employer seducing or trying to seduce his employee's wife or daughter.

In this way, as is often the case with Indian novelists and story-writers, the major form of exploitation indulged in by men of the middle and upper castes is sexual and only indirectly is the economic aspect of exploitation brought under notice. Nanak Singh is not a Marxist by any means though, as he himself admits, he has been influenced by socialist, communist and even anarchist parties and ideas. Still it is remarkable that nowhere does he describe the situation of the poor and exploited as a class phenomenon. In him there are only two classes in society, the rich and the poor, and they are as if pre-ordained to be such.

Indeed, all creeds akin to Christian or Gandhian socialism eschew the question of class conflict as the basis of oppression, economic, social as well as moral, but Nanak Singh shows himself to be particularly impervious to the phenomenon of class conflict. Oppressors of all varieties in his novels are in the end brought to reform themselves by the moral influence wrought by their more enlightened sons and daughters or by the heroic moral resilience of the women whom they are seeking to seduce. Only rarely is a male character made to suffer a tragic end such as Buchan Singh in *Chitta Lahu* or Kidar in *Pavittar Papi*. In *Ik Mian Do Talwaran*, historical fact would not allow him to make the hero, Kartar Singh Sarabha, escape death in the end, but he makes it less sombre and even romantic by creating a young woman, Biri, who has been secretly in love with him and comes to be wedded to him in his death-cell before he is hanged.

Appendix

Other Writings

Apart from novel and short story and a collection of songs entitled *Satguru Mahima* (Praise of the True Guru), Nanak Singh has written eight one-act plays and two full-length plays. These are minor works in comparison with his fiction. As mentioned above, the songs were written in his early youth in the highly charged atmosphere created by the Akali movement for the expulsion of the traditional guardians of the Sikh temples (Gurudwaras), a large majority of whom had treated their charge as their private property and indulged in carnal vice and luxury. The two major Gurudwaras at Amritsar and Nankana Sahib (district Gujranwala) were particularly mis-managed and misused. The movement was progressing under the moral pressure of the Sikh laity, when the custodian of the Gurudwara at Nanakana Sahib, the richest temple with thousands of acres of cultivable land attached to it, decided to teach a lesson to those who protested against his grossly immoral ways. In 1921 a band of some two hundred Akali Sikhs who had entered the temple to exert moral pressure on the custodian, not knowing of his designs to get them annihilated by a hired band of killers were shot down, killed and burnt half-dead or alive, but the custodian lost the battle for the possession of the temple. Some three or four of the hired killers were sentenced to death and the custodian himself to life imprisonment by the British judge in spite of the support of the British-headed

administration and bureaucracy. In the upshot, the temple was given over to an organisation devised for the purpose by the Sikh laity and called the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee. Later this committee was given legal validity by the Gurudwara Management Act of 1924, and continues to manage the Sikh temples to this day. Though many a versifier and propagandist wrote songs and poems about the purposes and progress of the movement, Nanak Singh's songs made a special appeal. As mentioned, above this booklet continued to yield a fair amount as royalty to the end of his life, though it does not rank high as literature.

The plays were written mostly during the days when Nanak Singh stayed at Prit Nagar, mentioned above, as contribution to the cultural activities in that settlement of Sikh and Panjabi intellectuals. Some of them were actually staged on occasions such as the annual get-together of the votaries and admirers of Gurubakhsh Singh and curious visitors to this place of a new cultural experiment.

These plays are to be taken mostly as festival comedies with a reformist purpose in line with contemporary thinking on the problems arising from the economic situation changing with the lop-headed educational and cultural developments characteristic of the time. Most of these are hilarious comedies and satires though some of them cannot be denied a fair amount of literary merit.

Dhobi da Kutta (The Washerman's Dog) is a farcical satire on the half-educated Congress worker with the ambition of acquiring political status, as member of a legislative body or other such organisation, and of making money. The protagonist is one Pandit Din Dayal who does not seem to have had even a modicum of education but becomes the secretary of a Congress committee and succeeds in making money by means not so legitimate and is ultimately caught in the net of the police. In the process he has also alienated his wife because of the temptation to exploit a young woman who comes to get some problem solved. In the end Din Dayal loses the ill-earned money and the educated Oma Devi whom he proposed to employ as his secretary as well as the honest wife, Malti, who leaves him in disgust. This earns him the epithet of the washerman's dog who does not fare well either at home or at the washing-place.

In *Sharabi* (The Drunkard), Karam Singh, a peasant who indulges in liquor, becomes a pauper and his wife and three children become beggars. His wife dies of hunger and illness and the children find refuge in an orphanage.

Pap da Phal (The Fruits of Sin) is a satire on the moral structure of our society. Jagmohan who is employed as a clerk but has literary ambitions has had to absent himself from his job because of the illness of his child. He writes a story which condemns capitalism. He has to give it to an editor who does not like the condemnation of capitalism to be explicit and suggests for the story the heading, 'Fruits of Sin'.

When the child becomes dangerously ill he goes to his employer, Lala Kishori Lal, to ask for some money. Lala Kishori Lal plays many ruses with his customers to be able to sell paper in the black market. Jagmohan has taken from his employer's shop a few batons which are of no use to the employer, but from whose covers Jagmohan's wife makes some envelopes to earn whatever they may fetch. When Kishori Lal learns of what he regards as theft and of the death of Jagmohan's child, he is so cruel as to call it the fruits of Jagmohan's sin.

Sarhsati (The Evil Hour) is about one Lala Duni Chand who has made money by black dealings in cloth. And right when he is digging a pit to bury his ill-earned wealth, the police comes to arrest him.

Jai Basantar Devata (Victory to the Goddess of Fire) deals with a girl, Lalita, who has arranged to go to the cinema with Vijay who loves her. When Lalita's brother, Prabodh, learns of it he prevents Lalita from going with Vijay with threats of dire consequences. Meanwhile, a friend of his, Yash, suggests to Prabodh to enquire who Vijay is. Lalita tells him that he is Gita's brother, and Gita is a girl whom Prabodh loves. Thus love that is unbearable as fire to Prabodh in Lalita's case is worshipful as a goddess in his own case.

Mahatma (The Great Soul) tells of the ruse that two indigent friends, Rama Ratan and Allah Ditta, play with the people. Allah Ditta becomes a Mahatma while Ram Ratan becomes a Brahmin. Ram Ratan goes about complaining that nobody is willing to provide him financial help to perform his daughter's marriage and comes to Allah Ditta, the saint who exhorts the people who have gathered around him to contribute in cash

and kind. When enough is collected he asks the Brahmin to take it away, and later leaves the place himself, pretending that he has to go to Haridwar.

In *Choran Nu Mor* (Thief Against Thief) Manmohan and his wife Ramkali collect in their sitting room some furniture, sofa, chairs, etc., from their neighbours to impress Chuni Lal who is coming to negotiate the marriage of his daughter to their son. But meanwhile the income-tax inspector comes to check up their wealth for the purpose of tax assessment. Manmohan and Ramkali mistake him for Chuni Lal and give an exaggerated account of their wealth. The inspector leaves them appreciating their honest cooperation, but tells them that it will not be too much to assess their tax at twenty thousand rupees. Learning of the mistake they conceal the borrowed furniture behind a curtain, for the income-tax inspector has told them that a superior officer will come to check up after him. Now instead of the superior officer, comes Chuni Lal. Manmohan and Ramkali profess equally overmuch their utter poverty. And when Chuni Lal tells them who he is, they are flabbergasted and tell him of their mistake. Chuni Lal counters with the remark that it is not they who have committed a mistake; but he was going to commit a similar mistake and thanks God for not committing it.

Of the full-length plays *Chaur Chanan* (Chanan the Fool) is a farce on the rich parents of a girl, their only child, who choose foolish Chanan for their daughter, in spite of his parents' poverty, because they think the son of such a family would suit them most—they want him to live with them. But Chanan exposes himself so much that somebody gives him a fake letter asking him to go back to his home as his father has died. It is thus that his parents-in-law get rid of him.

B.A. Pass is a farcical exposure of higher education in the twenties and thirties in India when sons of poor parents, sent to college for higher education, pretended some times to be scions of rich families but on graduation came home after failure to land a job. Such a boy, Jagdish, finds no peace at home and would have thrown himself before a train if some saintly man had not saved him. The saintly man tells him not to bother about a government job and become a worker for the country's freedom from British rule. Nanak Singh makes a farce of the situation of

educated unemployed in those days and suggests a rather facile way out. Thus, he gives only a variation of Dr Johnson's remark that patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel. Here it is a disappointed educated man who finds refuge in patriotism.

Many of these plays, with the exception perhaps of *Bhai Kanhayya* and *B.A. Pass*, could be staged successfully, though it has seldom been done.

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