



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

1

“A mem in the greenrooms of Colonial Lahore”: An Evaluation of Norah Richards’ Contribution to Modern Punjabi Theatre.¹

Sakoon N. Singh

Abstract:

Norah Richards is widely acknowledged to have played a catalyst in the emergence of social realism, as an important strain of Punjabi drama. She has been given the appellation “Lady Gregory of Punjab” and “The grand dame of Punjabi theatre.” My paper, which is part biographical, problematizes the nature of Norah Richards’ contribution, especially with regard to the language politics in colonial Punjab. Her insistence on social realism as a dominant strain in the times of volatile socio- religious reform movements in the state. Her student IC Nanda wrote “Dulhan” which is considered the first modern Punjabi play in 1913 followed by others. My sources are mostly drawn from her personal collection, now with Punjabi University at Patiala.

Keywords: Colonial Punjab, Theatre, Norah Richards, Modern Punjabi Theatre

When Maharaja Ranjit Singh was shown the map of India indicating the extent of British Indian occupation, marked in red, he shook his head and said “*Ik roz sab lal ho jayega* : One day it’ll all turn red.” (Singh 1) Part prophecy and part inevitability, Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s prediction was to come true shortly thereafter. After his death in 1839, the Lahore Durbar saw

¹ *The essay was written during the author’s tenure as Associate at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla in June 2019. The author would like to thank Prof Rajesh Sharma, Department of English, for his help in helping the author access primary material connected with Norah Richards at the Library, Punjabi University, Patiala.



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

2

what were mean machinations and blood baths lining the route to the Punjab throne. The British cocked a snook at the Punjab aristocracy and eliminated them one by one through political intrigues and military might, to eventually usurp the Sikh kingdom in 1849. Not only was Maharani Jind Kaur, the regent to the minor Maharaja Duleep Singh cunningly imprisoned and exiled, her son was sent to London and put directly under the ‘care’ of the Queen where he was

thoroughly anglicised. The ploy, thus, ensured irretrievable damage by the time the two woke up to the British designs.

Duleep Singh is a melancholic figure in the history of Punjab, not only for his vulnerability in being pushed into exile as a child, but also for the fractured anxious adult he turned out to be, tragically presenting a sharp contrast to the towering personality of his illustrious father, Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Unnaturally supplanted into an alien environment, shorn of mother’s care and denied accession rights, he was moulded into a dark, fretful figure who spent his days in the London Palace, mimicking the language and ways of his “protectors.” He is a dark, deeply conflicted figure doing the rounds of the palace corridors, in obsequious uncertainty, his pendulous shifts between servile beholdenness to the queen and a latent resentment at having been thrown out of the Sikh kingdom gnawing at his insides. In his rude supplanting into a foreign soil, totally against his will, his kingdom usurped and compensated by wholly insufficient royal doles, the Queen presented as his saviour when she had got him unlawfully smuggled out of Punjab, his anglicised upbringing, the imposition of Christianity on him, and by these measures, his allegiance bought over to the British echoes a Postcolonial conundrum of a typically “manufactured subject” in the interest of Empire. He was a physical manifestation of the syndrome. It is this fractured terrain that the larger context of Duleep Singh represents that becomes a concern for the present paper that addresses the emergence of modern Punjabi theatre under Norah Richards in the context of undulating terrain of language politics in the colonial state of Punjab and the socio reform movements that were initiated with the hardening of religious identity in an otherwise syncretic space. By 1849, the process of annexation of Punjab was complete and the British Administration had begun the work of administrative consolidation



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

3

in right earnest. Foremost was the issue of language. The British introduced Urdu and English as the medium of instruction as opposed to Punjabi despite the larger agreement on its colloquial usage and a rich literary tradition. This indicated not only the entry of western style education but also a denial of state patronage for modern development of Punjabi. As far as the organization was concerned, Punjabi did not even have the status of a language in their eyes. According to Shafqat Tanveer Mirza:

What were the reasons which forced the invaders to oppose the local language or languages? ...The most plausible reason was that the foreign rulers had recruited their civil and military forces from areas other than Punjab...to impose their rule in Punjab, Urdu was to be given an important place in the social, cultural and educational matrix of Punjab. That was the language of their native servants and as a matter of policy, needed to be foisted in the newly conquered territories. (Mirza, 226)

According to Farina Mir, John Lawrence, the President of the Board clearly indicated this in a note written in 1849: "It should be considered that Urdu is not a language of these districts, nor is Persian." (34) Furthermore, in 1863, when asked about the language practices of the people in his Punjab division, the Divisional Commissioner proclaimed "The Punjabee (language) itself is dying out." (5)

Colonial officials raised doubts if Punjabi was capable of serving as an administrative language...another objection was raised on the grounds that there was no established "standard" Punjabi. ..Punjabi did not further colonial officials' political aims. (Further)... Not only could using Punjabi have helped prompt a Sikh resurgence, but there were decided political and administrative advantages to instituting Urdu instead. (Mir, 6)

This apartheid against Punjabi stemmed out of two fundamental reasons: One, there were doubts if Punjabi was developed enough to be used for administrative work. Since the earlier regime too had depended on Persian, it could have strengthened a line of thinking that relegated Punjabi to a subordinate position. Two, the British, in their pragmatism to consolidate the British



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

4

proress combined with the efficiency they had already achieved in Urdu in most parts of the country, for the sake of ease, decided to opt for Urdu. It spared battalions of officers and administrative staff, the vagaries of learning a new language.

The educational institutions set up by social reform organisations in collaboration with Christian missionaries constituted the new apparatus of dissemination of education. The Western style education was focussed on Western texts and therefore formal education and literature went in two different directions. This can be seen to constitute a massive fracture in the psyche of Punjabi people who were required to now learn and officially communicate in Urdu and English. A schism between their cognitive and affective worlds became quite apparent. However, Farina Mir, in her study of Punjabi ethos with the *kissa kaav* as the centre point contends that even though Urdu and English henceforth became language of Punjab, Punjabi continued to be the language of the home and hearth, the language of the community experience. So, Punjabi indeed prospered in the intimate confines of the community space and furthermore, continued an unbroken tradition of the *kissa kaav* and other indigenous genres purely on the basis of the peoples' love of the language rather than expected patronage of the ruling class. Punjabi was to always occupy this space: an intimate space of the home and hearth where it continued to be the language of the emotional make up of the people, the language of the folk, the language of the most intimate experiences. According to Mir:

...Punjabi literary culture enjoyed relative independence from the colonial state particularly vis a vis certain other vernacular languages such as Hindi, Urdu and Bengali. This relative independence allowed greater scope for continuity with pre-colonial practices... (4)

The pre-colonial Punjabi boasted a vibrant literary culture, abundance of literary compositions and ubiquitous oral performances. So, in a way since Punjabi was never accorded the official status and patronage, it was independent from colonial institutions, and more significantly, continued a relationship with pre-colonial practices. It continued to be a robust form of inter



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

5

personal communication and that continues till today. Mir contends that ‘Pragmatic engagement with colonial institutions turned out to be less important than affective attachments of its adherents.’ (34) Mir’s contention that Punjabi, at the cost of denial of state patronage, did flourish in intimate spaces that were immune from the detrimental effects of colonial rule ought to be considered in the present discussion.

These facts about Punjabi language are significant in our assessment of the state of Punjabi language at this time in Punjab: the denial of state patronage, the imposition of Urdu and English and how the new triumvirate of Urdu- English- Punjabi affected literary production, especially theatre at this point in time. Particularly, in the context of theatre, it can be seen as to how language is its very flesh, blood and bone. Without an authentic spoken expression that people relate to, at an everyday basis, theatre would remain at best a mimicry and at worst, disservice.

Norah Richards (b. 1876) came to Lahore in 1911 when her husband Philips Earnest Richards joined as Professor of English at the Dyal Singh College. The college was founded in 1910 by philanthropist, educationist Dyal Singh Majithia who also founded the newspaper *The Tribune* in 1881 and was an ardent follower of Brahma Samaj, which in turn had affiliation with Unitarian Christianity and therefore saw the entry of the Richards couple. Norah had been a theatre actress at the National Theatre in Dublin and was naturally inclined to know the goings on of the Lahore theatre better. In the personal family letters, later compiled as *Indian Dust* by her husband, in one instance of correspondence (to his mother), there is a mention of the young couple going for evening shows of the local *Ram Lila*.

It was an amateur performance connected with the Hindu festival of Dasehra...what sensitive, gentle and delicate faces! Look at that boy in olive velvet frock coat, white trousers and pink turban...we have not such human porcelain in England... (Philips Earnest Richards 20)

Punjab had a long line of thriving folk theatrical forms like *naqqal*, *swang*, *dhadi*, *mirasis*, *bhands*, *jangam* etc. The folk practitioners were a part and parcel of village community,



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

6

participating in marriages, childbirths and additionally providing a means of community entertainment in the people's own idiom. Dramatic entertainments based on Ramayana, like *Ramlila* and short dramatisations from *puranas* were put up, particularly during the season of the important festivals of Dussehra and Diwali. The act of watching a play on stage was, however, not a part of the larger ethos. It was an emerging activity and limited to a miniscule population of city dwellers. The Lahore theatre at that time had personages like Bawa Budhh Singh (1878-1931) who was more inclined towards satire and farce with no reformist zeal. His plays *Mundri Chhal* (Ring Trick, 1908) and *Chandar Hari* (1909) had been popular. Braj Lal Shastri confined himself to dramatisation of old *puranic* and folk legends and wrote plays like *Savitri*, *Sukanya*, *Kunal* and *Puran Bhagat*. Bhai Vir Singh, had composed *Raja Lakhdatta Singh*, (1910), a closet drama that was useful in exalting a Sikh precept. Other attempts include Gur Baksh Singh Barrister's *Brij Mohan*, Feroze Din Sharaf's *Hir Syal*, Aroor Singh Taib's *Sukka Samundar* (Dry Sea 1912) Gurbax Singh's *Natak Manmohan* (1912). (See discussion by Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry and Teja Singh Gill in Anand Lal ed. 363-65 and Sekhon and Duggal eds., 331-333)

Norah Richards set up the Saraswati Stage Society on March 8th 1915 at the Dyal Singh College to organise students for productions and continued a tradition of two performances a year. The college trust built an open air theatre in 1913. She describes the inaugural ceremony thus:

The stage has a lofty roof and verandahs...the Saraswati Theatre was opened by a prologue written in Urdu by Shanti Sarup* (our one time Puck) in which our patron Goddess appeared...after that Saraswati prologue became an institution with us. (2)

Their maiden production was "Midsummer Night's Dream" in 1911 and was re-staged on the tercentenary of Shakespeare in 1916. Other Shakespeare productions that were staged under the tutelage of Richards were "The Merchant of Venice" (1913) "As You Like It" (1912; for which a temporary amphitheatre was erected and saw a full house at a paid entry at four *annas*), "Coriolanus" (1913) and "Twelfth Night" (1914). Richards directed "Spreading the News" by



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

7

Lady Gregory in April 1912. Her student IC Nanda, who went on to pioneer modern playwriting in Punjabi, adapted “Merchant of Venice” into Punjabi as “Shamu Shah” in 1928. The connection was probably owing to the centrality of moneylender/*shahukaar* class in Punjab. Nanda had made his acting debut in “Spreading the News.”

Apart from Shakespeare emanating from the English classroom of the likes of Norah Richards and other anglicised colleges, Parsee theatre was another font of Shakespeare productions in Lahore. This became a highly popular form and its exigencies were more commercial than cultural. The Parsee theatre style employed proscenium stage, elaborate pageantry, spectacle and scripts from both Indian and Western texts. Its specialised “Shakespeare Natak Mandali” emerged as one of the leading troupes. They undertook extensive translations of Shakespeare in Urdu and performed some shows in Lahore. Some important productions were: “Khun-e-nahaq”: 1898 (Hamlet), “Shahid-e-Wafa”: 1898 (Othello), “Dilfarosh”: 1900 (Merchant of Venice), “Safed Khun”: 1906 (King Lear) and “Gorakhdhanda” : 1909 (Comedy of Errors). With the beginning of the English medium education Punjab was increasingly affected by Pan Indian influences that were current, including Urdu. As far as theatre was concerned, it had two implications: The introduction of western theatre by Western Educational institutions, when it was a novel sight to behold ‘Punjabi boys and girls dressed in tailcoats and crinolines.’ (Gargi, 152) and secondly, more exposure to travelling theatre forms like Parsee Theatre. Stylistically, western elements viz., One- Act Drama, proscenium stage, painted scenery etc were thus introduced.

As far as Shakespeare was concerned Norah Richards’ student driven productions went against the grain of the out and out commercial productions of the Parsee Theatre. In these circumstances, Shakespeare was important to the extent that it became a third space, eventually giving way to original One-Act dramas in Punjabi.

Richards and the Irish Renaissance



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

8

It is imperative to understand the background that Norah Richards had had in Irish theatre. The Abbey Theatre and the proponents of the Irish Renaissance that included Lady Gregory, Synge and WB Yeats had long struggled with the issue of having an authentic language for Irish stage. Irish had diminished as a spoken tongue, remaining the main daily language only in isolated rural areas, with English having become the dominant language in the majority of Ireland. Under the Gaelic League (1893) they struggled to unearth their Gaelic culture roots in the search of a more authentic Irish expression. The objective of the League was to encourage the use of Irish in everyday life in order to counter the ongoing anglicization of the country. They were in quest of a “noble and spiritualised past” that could become a fundamental construct of national identity and could erase divisions along the lines of class, religious and political lines. The practitioners at the Abbey Theatre were very conscious of this enterprise. They were desirous of showing Ireland “...not as home of buffoonery and easy sentiment but home of ancient wisdom.” (166). A new credo emerged wherein it was proclaimed that:

On the stage one must have reality and one must have joy...rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality. (167)

Thus a semblance of an idealized verisimilitude became the immediate cherished goal of these dramatists. As a result of this, Lady Gregory and William Boyle used extremely realistic register for their drama productions. The obsession with realism of spoken word grew to an extent that some playwrights began to record spoken speech to replicate it *verbatim* in the plays. While it was certainly a boost to the connection it created with Irish, it was indiscrete to completely discard the poetic element. Eventually it led to the realisation that it had been a case of too careful a mimesis that had totally compromised on the poetic value. So the attempts were only moderately successful. Norah Richards had been in the midst of these personages and debates and certainly led her to a similar experimentation with Punjabi language in Lahore.

Experiments in Lahore



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

9

After an initial experimentation with Shakespeare and select Irish scripts Norah began to urge her students to begin writing original scripts in Punjabi. This was in clear departure from the Education policy which had earlier made Urdu and English the mediums of instruction. Norah organised a group of young students and through exhortation and discipline, encouraged them to write original scripts about Punjabi society and their current social issues.

We can conceive that one of our own college Dramatic societies, having grown legitimately a little tired of acting Shakespeare might call upon its own members to supply it with plays for the coming performance, venturing a little more boldly with our imagination we can conceive pens setting to work and painting pictures of present day life in Punjab, in a language of the Punjab, of popular appeal to a Punjab audience. (Norah Richards 20)

The Saraswati Society has blossomed for the first time in the garden which is called Punjab...The seed which we desire to produce and scatter is the seed of a particular kind of artistic effort, that of the composition of plays, tales and poems which shall treat of contemporary Punjab life...the noblest sight in the Punjab is the Punjab itself and the noblest topic for contemplation is the life of man, woman or child, or of classes of men or women as it is lived today...some literary picture of the drama of life in its marvellous surroundings. (Norah Richards, *The Saraswati Annual* 1)

In another context, while lamenting the fact that her protégé IC Nanda was moving to Multan, she hoped that “he will develop Panjabi drama rather than spend his energies on Shakespearean productions.” (Norah Richards, 2)

Two things were happening here: One was at the level of technique and the other at the level of subject matter. Norah wrote a treatise called “Playwriting”- giving a descriptive analysis of the elements of playwriting and how the young playwrights ought to be mindful of those while writing their plays. On the issue of her encouragement of students to write plays about social issues, she was providing them a space that was about reform but not necessarily tied to their



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

10

religious affiliation. Norah instituted a competition in writing plays in 1913 in which Ishwar Chander Nanda participated with his maiden attempt in Punjabi, *Suhag*, a one act play which was adjudged the best and staged in 1913, thus becoming the first Punjabi One Act play to be staged. It is the story of a ten year old girl who is tragically substituted as a bride in the wedding ceremony of her elder sister when she goes missing. It was later published under the title *Dulhan* (The Bride). He subsequently published *Subhadra* in 1922 on the theme of widow remarriage. It became an instant success and was staged in many colleges across Punjab. This was followed by *Lily da Viah* (Finding a Husband for Lily ; 1928; *Social Circle* and over twenty plays in three collections *Jhalkare* (Reflections) *Lishkare* (Flashes) *Chamkare* (Shines). The initial influence of Shakespeare visible in his plays subsequently gave way to a more ironic, minimalist strain of Ibsen. (Sekhon and Duggal 334) Subsequently others like Dr Harcharan Singh wrote (*Jivan Lila* 1940), *Nava Chanan* (1941) *Man Dian Man Vich* (Defeated Aspirations). He imbibed progressive influences and also wrote on Sikh themes. Balwant Gargi (b 1916) was a later protégé wrote *Mogha* (Outlet) on farmer's protest, *Ghugi* (the Dove), *Kesaro* and *Kanak di Balli* on caste politics.

Social Realism and Socio Religious Reform movements

Social reform in the last half century had arisen from within the folds of the three major religions in Punjab. After the British annexation, for the very first time specific individual religious identity was demanded as a part of the census exercise. Sudipta Kaviraj has argued that such specific demand resulted in “epistemological transformation in India society from a ‘fuzzy’ social world to an enumerated one, with significantly sharper contours of differentiation.” (quoted by Mir 18) This had led to the fossilization of religious identities to some extent. Punjab, which had had syncretic religious spaces like the folk *qissa kaav* and the experience of Gurbani and *sufi kaav* itself had necessitated syncretic experience that called for a common fund of matters of faith. However, with the ‘introduction of limited Indian participation in the Government, in final decades of nineteenth century, the enumeration of religious communities took on a new significance in political arenas as these communities now staked claim to



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

11

representation according to their strength in numbers. The creation of separate electorate for Muslims in 1909 only formalised a process that the colonial state had already put in place. (18) The colonial state's political agenda and the advent of democratic politics contributed to an increased political antagonism between religious communities.

Subsequently the activities of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim reformers active in colonial Punjab had an immense impact in fomenting a more communalised society. Such reformers were prompted to action both by intellectual currents within their tradition and by changes in society brought about by colonialism. An important aspect of the latter was the Punjab Government's tacit support for Christian missionary activity in the province. Although missionaries were not immediately successful in gaining converts, their presence, and methods and state support made their presence particularly alarming to activists among other religions. Christian missionary activity, therefore, was one of the various factors that spurred religious reform. (Kenneth Jones 1989, Harjot Oberoi 1994)

'Socio religious reform activity in colonial Punjab was particularly pronounced because of the significant presence of all three major religious communities- Hindu, Muslim and Sikh: Muslims were in majority (53%) followed by Hindus (39%) and Sikhs (7%).' Amongst the Hindus, Arya Samaj (started by Dayanand Saraswati in 1875) and Brahmo Samaj were dominant, among Sikhs, the Singh Sabha Movement (founded in Amritsar in 1873) and among the Muslims, the Ahmadiya Movement (founded in 1889). They were inward looking organisations and focussed on beliefs and practices of their respective religions. There began a vogue of inter religious debates that focussed rather stridently on the superiority of a given religious thought over another. The practitioners indulged in elaborate public debates, sometimes bordering on creating a spectacle. Debates between Ahmadiya community and Arya Samaj were said to be particularly vitriolic. The relations between Arya Samaj and Singh Sabha too, had been hitherto cordial but increasingly led to charged disagreements by the end of nineteenth century. (Kenneth Jones, 1968. 51)



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

12

‘There is large scale agreement between scholars that socio religious reform activities in Punjab contributed to increasingly rigid religious identities. The careful distinctions iterated between religious communities in the wake of reformers’ agitations were not simply about difference but included an act of opposition: religions pitted against each other and competing for adherents and patronage from the colonial state. The contentious atmosphere bled into formal political arena where increasingly by the turn of twentieth century Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs clashed.

By the end of the nineteenth century this newly strengthened communal consciousness was exported from Punjab by such movements as the Arya Samaj and the Ahmadiyas. In four decades before independence the attitude, the strategies, and organizations predominant in Punjab spread to other areas of the subcontinent, carrying with them forms of aggressive, religious competition.’ (22) In time it also led to the segregation of communities on linguistic lines. Whereas Punjabi began to be connected with Sikh identity, Hindi was connected with Hindu and Urdu with Muslim. Reform became tied to this practice and led to large scale divisiveness in the name of religion. Religious reform, if at all it occurred to the so called religious leaders who were blinded with love of their own religious affiliations, could only emanate from within the space of the religion and never outside. So, Norah Richards’ attempts were in a way self critical but without the self-consciousness and denial being spurred by the religious reform movements.

According to Rajmohan Gandhi:

The religio-political controversies marking Punjab in the last quarter of the nineteenth century did not merely divide Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs from one another. They also produced schisms within each of Punjab’s Muslim, Hindu and Sikh worlds. (70)

Conclusion



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

13

It is important in this context to understand that Norah Richards spurred a tradition of critical thinking outside the space of religion as a sure sign of modernity. Also, being encouraged to write in the Punjabi language capturing the spoken idiom of the region had the effect of binding social experience more on lines of community than religion. Farina Mir contends that language is undoubtedly a critical arena for the operation of colonial power. According to Mir “The history of language policy in colonial Punjab where the language of administration was carefully considered for its ability to integrate the province into broader structures of colonial authority bears out this important relationship between language and empire.” (30) Farina Mir contends in this context that despite English and Urdu being introduced as official languages, Punjabi remained resilient. It suffered in the absence of state patronage and was denied the natural fruits of the progression of the printing press. Mir’s contention is that in these circumstances too Punjabi prospered only because of one factor and that was people’s love for the language and cutting all state embargoes it continued to flourish in the confines of home and hearth. It was largely due to this reason that Punjabi theatre continued to have an authentic ring for people in Punjab. It was in these circumstances that Norah announced a competition for students wherein original one act plays would be submitted by students. In the Saraswati Annual, she writes about the mandate of the society to encourage original writing. She wrote a treatise on Play writing wherein she talks in detail about different elements in a highly pedagogical way. Like a hard task master, she lists the infirmities of the current play writing and elaborates upon the methods to achieve more cogent and stage worthy writing. In the first competition, IC Nanda’s *Suhaag (Dulhan)*, declared the winner. This play has been considered as the first modern play in the annals of Punjabi theatre.

As discussed, this initiated a movement of a kind wherein Norah played a catalyst in inspiring Punjabi youth towards writing original dramas. The themes that the students took up were mostly social and reformist in nature which brings us to the delicate subject of reform movements in Punjab.



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

14

After Punjab came under the rule of the British and with the introduction of the census, a clear cut demarcation of individual identity on the basis of religion became inevitable. This spurred language reform in an altogether different direction. The time became witness to highly volatile debates between religious leaders upholding precepts of their religions and denouncing others. Social reform within religions became a particularly sensitive area because it began to be sought as an inside job without being 'exposed' to critics from other religions. Reform in a sense also thus became a communal activity and there is no doubt that this time was one in which society saw a rise of fossilisation of religious identities and rise of communalism. In these circumstances, Norah Richards' insistence on writing on social themes could have become an inflammatory issue but on the contrary her insistence that youth ought to write on social issues turned out to be productive probably because this space was away from the religious spaces that were taking on social reform as an extension of their bounden duty to defend their religious practices. So in a sense, the space of the college teeming with young minds that were being taught to be self critical, and not always eulogising, to create new plays out of socio cultural situations rather than mimicking the west and using their scripts was important.

Overall, Richards' contribution can be understood at two levels: one at the level of theatre and other at the level of community. Her contribution lies in encouraging youth to be critical about their culture in an objective way and depict that through authentic art. Secondly it was her ongoing endeavour to connect theatre to community for which the rural plays of Lady Gregory were her model. She tried to create an outside third space which was outside the confines of both the administration as well as the religious affiliations, to facilitate an authentic, new mode of play writing. Her insistence on realism which was a remnant of her training at the National theatre in Dublin did create a nursery of playwrights who promoted that and in course of time, it did remain a more dominant strain in Punjabi theatre. Her contribution was in creating a new idiom in Punjabi theatre that appealed to the hearts and minds of the contemporary audiences, besides encouraging an authentic engagement with the highly fraught reality of Punjab at the turn of the century.



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

15

Works Cited:

Primary Source: From the *Norah Richards' personal collection* housed at the Punjabi University, Patiala:

Earnest Richards, Philips. *Indian Dust: Being Letters from the Punjab*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1932.

“The Saraswati Annuals: Being the Organ of Saraswati Society.” Vol II, No 2. Pub, 1919, 1920.

“The Little Theatre Group at Work.” New Delhi. Date not mentioned.

Souvenir of the staging of *Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare by the Saraswati Stage Society. Lahore, 1919. It contains a short essay on Shakespeare and its relevance to Punjab by Norah Richards.

A booklet called “Woodlands” Edited by Jai Dyal. It has a year wise enumeration of Norah Richard's career, stage productions and writings. 1956. No publication details.

A pamphlet called “Woodlands” 1957. No publication details.

Norah Richards. *Playwriting*. 1922. No publication details.

---. *Rural Civilization*. Lahore: The Kapur Art Printing Works, 1945.

Secondary Sources:

Craig, Edward Gordon. *On the Art of Theatre*. London: Heinemann, 1968. First pub. 1911.

Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Punjab: A History from Aurangzeb to Mountbatten*. New Delhi: Aleph, 2013.

Gargi, Balwant. *Theatre in India*. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1962.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge, 2006.



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

16

Lal, Ananda ed. *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*. New Delhi: OUP, 2004.

Lee, Josephine. "Linguistic Imperialism, The Early Abbey Theatre and the Translations of Brian Friel." J Ellen Gainor ed *Imperialism and Theatre: Essays on World Theatre, Drama and Performance*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. 164-181.

Mir, Farina. *The Social Space of Language*. Berkeley and Los Angeles. University of California Press Ltd, 2010.

Mirza, Shafqat Tanveer. *Resistance Themes in Punjabi Literature*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publishers, 1992.

Pavis, Patrice. *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

Puri, Harish and Paramjit Singh Judge. Eds. *Social and Political Movements*. Jaipur: Rawat, 2000.

Sekhon, Sant Singh and Kartar Singh Duggal. *A History of Punjabi Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1992.

Sekhon, Sant Singh. *A History of Punjabi Literature*. Patiala: Punjabi University Publication Bureau, 1996.

Singh Nikky- Guninder Kaur. *Of Sacred and Secular Desire: An anthology of Lyrical Writings from the Punjab*. London: I B Tauris, 2012.

Subramanyam, Lakshmi. *Modern Indian Drama: Issues and Interventions*. New Delhi: Srishti, 2008.

Vatsyayan, Kapila. *Traditional Indian Theatre: Multiple Streams*. New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1980.



A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

17

Verma, Satish Kumar. *Veehvi Sadi da Punjabi Natak* (Punjabi Drama of Twentieth Century)
New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002.