

Chapter I

Introduction

Gurdial Singh, commonly known as a “realist” novelist for his microscopic vision of life, is an excellent craftsman not only of words but of ideas too. As far as the selection of the diction is concerned his approach is predominantly “heteroglotic.” His ideas, which are often complex and multifarious, are presented through different characters taken from the rural agricultural setting of mid-twentieth century Punjab (roughly covering three decades i.e. from 1950s to 1970s). The dialect he has chosen to use is unquestionably *Malwai* with all its particularities which are in congruence with the rural settings of his novels. Because of their rural and agricultural background, the characters of Gurdial Singh’s almost all the novels remain politically naïve. However, they seem to be dominated by and committed to one particular point of view or ideology that generally remains consistent throughout the discourse. This particular characteristic helps them to emerge as distinctive and out-of-the-ordinary personae. They remain very close to their surroundings, while at the same time, successfully manage to retain their individual outlook about the life and the world.

The Life and works of Gurdial Singh

Gurdial Singh, one of the most celebrated literary figures of the country, was born on January 10, 1933 in a small village Bhaini Fattah in Sangrur district of Malwa region of Punjab (Tarsem vii). His father was a carpenter and the economic condition of his family was not satisfactory. At a very young age, he was withdrawn from school by his father so that he could assist him in his profession. Gurdial Singh worked hard as a carpenter with his father from 1945 to 1953. Meanwhile he got married to Balwant Kaur (Nikki) when he was only thirteen years old. But he did not ignore his studies and continued passing exams as a private student. During this period, the headmaster of his school kept encouraging and helping him with his guidance and relevant study material.

By 1954, Gurdial Singh had completed his Matric and *Gyani* and thus became eligible for teaching in primary schools. The headmaster of the school where he studied helped him to get a job in a government school. His first appointment as a teacher was in the village Kotra near Mansa. He had to live there leaving his family behind at home. He taught in different primary schools from 1954 to 1962. In an interview conducted by Gurmeet Singh, Gurdial Singh's wife tells that the initial three-four years, when he (Gurdial Singh) started reading and writing, were the most difficult ones. There was not a single penny in our house and we had two children depended on us. He was doing *Gyani* and at the same time teaching junior classes. Twenty or twenty-five rupees, which he was getting as a teacher, were not sufficient to feed their children. One day, when Gurdial Singh sold her *saggi-full*¹, she could not even feel the taste of her meal for many days (Gurmeet 47).

Walking along with familial responsibilities and economic hardships, Gurdial Singh completed his graduation in 1964 and post graduation (Punjabi) in 1967. He started teaching Punjabi in the Middle and High schools in 1963. In 1971, he joined Government Barjindra College, Faridkot as a lecturer in Punjabi and retired as a professor from Punjabi University, Patiala. After retirement he settled at his native place i.e. Jaito Mandi.

Gurdial Singh started his career as a writer with short stories. He wrote many short stories during his life and up to now has nearly one dozen short story collections to his credit:

1. *Saggi Phul* (1961)
2. *Chan Da Buta* (1963)
3. *Opra Ghar* (1966)
4. *Kutta Te Aadmi* (1971)
5. *Masti Bota* (1982)
6. *Rukhe Misse Bande* (1984)
7. *Begana Pind* (1985)

¹ A traditional ornament which is worn on the head of women in Punjab

8. *Chonvian Khanian* (1988)
9. *Pakka Tikana* (1990)
10. *Keekar Di Dhingri* (1991)
11. *Meri Pratinidhi Rachna* (1992)

His short stories have been applauded throughout the country because of their wide range of subject matters and also for the depiction of very minute and adept portrayal of the different human situations. Apart from the short stories, another genre which demands considerable attention for his contribution to literature is his writings for children. He has written eight books for children in which he successfully depicted those innate propensities that suit the delicate minds. These books are rich sources of knowledge about mutual understanding between individuals and offer the children a broad vision towards human life.

1. *Bakalam Khud* (1960)
2. *Tuk Kho Laye Kawan* (1963)
3. *Likhtum Baba Khema* (1971)
4. *Baba Khema* (1988)
5. *Gappian Da Pio* (1989)
6. *Mahabharat* (1990)
7. *Tin Kadam Dharti* (1993)
8. *Khate Mithe Lok* (1993)

Over the years, Gurdial Singh has proved to be a tireless hard worker in the field of writing ordinary people's emotions and dreams. In his effort to do so, he has also written three plays in early 1980s. They are:

1. *Farida, Ratin Wadian* (1982)
2. *Vidayagi De Pichon* (1982)
3. *Nikki Moti Gal* (1982)

His prose works are:

1. *Punjab de Mele te Teohar* (1988)
2. *Nian Mattiyan* (1999)

3. *Dooji Dehi* (2000)

Along with these original creations, he has translated more than thirty books so far. And his own works also have been translated in different Indian and foreign languages by different renowned translators of the country.

Now we move to that genre in which Gurdial Singh has been most effectual in painting the different shades of the lives of common people of his native land. This genre is none other than the 'novel' - the twentieth century's most popular and probably the most appropriate form of portraying different human conditions in contemporary era. Gurdial Singh has written ten novels so far. They are:

1. *Marhi Da Diva*². (1964)
2. *Unhoye*³. (1966)
3. *Rete Di Ik Muth* (1967)
4. *Kuwela* (1968)
5. *Adh Chanani Raat*⁴. (1972)
6. *Athan Uggan* (1974)
7. *Annhe Ghode Da Daan* (1976)
8. *Pauh Phutale Ton Pehlan* (1982)
9. *Parsa*⁵. (1991)
10. *Aahan* (2009)

Almost all the novels of Gurdial Singh are important and contribute something thematically significant to understand the intricacies of human behaviour in different situations and, therefore, demand a very deep, sincere and speculative insight of the researcher. However, due to the limitations of the present study, we would focus only

²Since its publication, *Marhi Da Diva* has been translated into many Indian and foreign languages. In English it has been translated as *The Last Flicker* by Ajmer S. Rode in 1993.

³*Unhoye* has been translated into English as *The Survivors* by Prof. Rana Nayar in 2005.

⁴*Adh Chanani Raat* has been translated into English as *Night of the Half Moon* by Prof. Pushpinder Syal and Prof. Rana Nayar.

⁵*Parsa* has been translated into English as *Parsa* by Prof. Rana Nayar in 1999.

on those texts which help us to organize our study around a particular conceptualization i.e. heroism. These texts are *The Last Flicker (Marhi Da Diva)*, *The Survivors (Unhoye)*, *Night of the Half Moon (Adh Chanani Raat)* and *Parsa*.

His first and the most popular novel *The Last Flicker (Marhi Da Diva)* was, at the time of its publication, an experimental novel which not only got huge applause for its compactness but also set a new trend in Punjabi fiction writing. The novel was certainly unconventional in many ways. It broke with the traditional concept of hero who generally used to be a high ranking and influential man in the writings of Gurdial Singh's predecessors. Gurdial Singh shifted his focus from upper-class peasantry to ordinary men (especially towards poor peasants or landless labourers) and also to their struggle as individuals against their problematic circumstances.

Considering its position in the background of twentieth century literary trends, which primarily dominated the Western thought (roughly from 1950s to 1970s), we would easily be convinced that it was one of the representative novels of its time. After World War I, different movements like *Surrealism*, *Dadaism*, *Imagism*, the movement of the Angry Young Men, Beat Writers, Theory of the Absurd etc. were attacking the traditional norms in different ways. Post-modernism or the age of *simulacra* struck the stage during 1960s and 1970s though its background was prepared by all the above mentioned movements and theories because they all, in one way or the other, refuted the authorities of the different established forms. *The Last Flicker* also does the same in the sense that it deconstructs the prevailing themes of Punjabi novels by introducing realistic and close-to-life depiction of underprivileged sections of society.

In the historical development of the Punjabi novels, the major novelists like Bhai Veer Singh, Mohan Singh Vaid and Charan Singh Shaheed wrote novels by keeping in mind the major ideological assumptions of Sikh religion. Their main focus remained on constructing an ideal image of a Sikh soldier who would always follow the teachings of Sikh Gurus. In the next phase of the development of Punjabi novel, the novelists like Nanak Singh, Colonel Narinderpal Singh, Jaswant Singh Kanwal, Surinder Singh Narula, Sohan Singh Seetal and Sant Singh Sekhon were idealists and

their approach was predominantly meliostic. They believed that society should be free of immorality and it needs to be corrected which is possible only with the efforts of individuals. Consequently they presented their protagonists as idealists. The central themes of their novels were the demonstration of a prolonged tension between the evil force and the ideal goodness in which the ultimate victory was assigned to the latter. For instance, Nanak Singh, in his *Chitta Lahoo* [White Blood] depicts a character Bachan Singh who vows to correct society by his ideal thoughts. He loves a girl Sundari whom other people consider an untouchable because she is brought up by a vagabond Rodu. He helps her to complete her studies and also encourages her to become a social worker. He is trapped by Pala Singh and his friends in a false case and for that he is sentenced to death by the court. Sundari avenges his death by burning Pala Singh and his friends alive. In the end of the novel Sundari commits suicide because she thinks herself guilty of burning three people. Sundari's mother Gurdeyi (who was sold to become a prostitute in Delhi) dramatically kills the culprits and then commits suicide. Sham Das, the father of Sundari, dramatically admits all his mistakes and promises to be a good man in the end. Therefore, whoever breaks the moral codes in the novel either gets killed or turns to goodness in the end.

Gurdial Singh turns away from this idealistic attitude of his forerunners and depicts life as it is actually experienced by the people of his native land. With his entry in the world of Punjabi literature (especially in novels), the focus was shifted dramatically from idealism to realism and further realism to hyper-realism. His novels therefore deconstruct the traditional trends in which goodness always wins over the evil.

In *The Last Flicker*, Jagseer, the protagonist, belongs to the lower stratum of society. He is honest, hard working and docile. He is poor but full of self-respect. He does not get married despite being outstandingly handsome and gentle. But regardless of all these qualities, he is undervalued and defeated by the system. The narrator does not provide his hero any heavenly support or supernatural power to overcome his problematic circumstances. He has to fight against the system alone, like Prometheus – essentially as an individual.

In *The Survivors*, Gurdial Singh depicts the struggle between a stoic person Bishna and the repressive structures. The underlying tone, attitude and the spirit of the protagonist of *The Survivors* change quite significantly as we compare him with the protagonist of the previous novel *Marhi Da Diva*. Whereas Jagseer is soft-spoken, covert and reticent, Bishna is blunt, overt and aggressive in nature. He, along with his wife Daya Kaur, struggles for the protection of his ancestral house which the state authorities want him to leave (because a road is to be built exactly at the same place where his house is located). The narration simultaneously seems to be working on two different levels. On the surface level, Bishna seems to be struggling for a piece of land (his house) but on the deeper level, his struggle symbolizes an exertion to save essential human dignity of an individual which according to his conscience is more important. The novel depicts the journey of a man (Bishna) who does not like to leave anything to fate. Nevertheless, he shows faith in his own concrete decisions. He is conscious of the fact that walking on this path he would have to face many hardships and problematic situations. But what surprises the readers is that the protagonist is not destabilized by these problematic situations rather they give him an amazing strength and courage to stand against the establishment with more assurance and firmness. At a point, it seems that the difference between the victory and defeat of the protagonist has been diminished and the journey or the struggle has itself become more significant.

Night of the Half Moon reflects on the internal rivalry of two agrarian families of rural Punjab. The title “Adh Chanani Raat” or “Night of the Half Moon” is suggestive and symbolic in many ways. The life of the protagonist of the novel Modan appears to be divided into two phases: life before committing the murder of Ghana and after that. His life after committing the murder of Ghana can be compared to night because of the hardships and difficulties he has to face. Bhani’s love symbolizes a ray of light, a hope, in his life. It is the ‘night of the half moon’ because it remains for a very short period and that too does not content his heart completely.

Modan has been depicted as quite different in temperament and attitude from his brothers Sajjan and Chhottu. Their father was trickily killed by Ghana. Modan

could not control himself and in revenge, murdered Ghana. After that he was imprisoned for twelve years. In his absence, his brothers develop friendly relations for economic benefits with the sons of Ghana who are also crooked. When Modan returns home after completing his sentence, he finds everything changed around him. He feels lonely and abandoned even in his own family. He thinks it unreasonable to develop any kind of relations with their enemies. But his brothers do not find any harm in it as long as they are getting some economic and personal benefits out of it. On this ground, he decides to break with his brothers and starts living alone in his old house out of the village.

He is the only one who does not compromise with the situation and decides to choose the path less travelled by i.e. the path of unending struggle. He knows very well what it means to be different. He is conscious that he has to pay a heavy price for walking on the path he has chosen. But something inside him does not allow him to carry himself in the direction of the wind. He rather stands against it without caring for the difficulties and troubles which might be entailed.

The next novel *Parsa* is a little more philosophical than the other novels of Gurdial Singh. It is also the most complex and multifarious in nature and the author took quite a long time for writing it. In this novel, the author creates the character of the protagonist by keeping in mind the ideological and philosophical characteristics of the mythic figure of Parashurama. The character of Parsa in this way appears to be the modern representation of the whole mythical world of Parashurama, the sixth incarnation of god Vishnu.

The particular feature of this novel is that the ideologies of the protagonist and their impact on the other characters of the novel are revealed through their conversations along with their actions. On many occasions, long philosophical dialogues between the characters – for instance the dialogues between Parsa and Pala or Parsa and Sant Narang Das – can be observed.

Parsa has been projected as a being living with self-respect, stoicism and determinedness. He lives according to certain principles and, with the help of them,

creates his personal world. In this personal world he is the only master and nobody else has the power to influence him. At the time of the death of his wife Biro, he does not follow any social custom but only his inner conscience and nobody dares question him. He maintains this attitude even when dealing with his own sons. He does not like to interfere in their decisions, neither does he allow them to question his own. He treats everyone, including his own sons, as an individual irrespective of his social or official background. For him, there is no difference between his farm-hand Tindi and the Deputy Superintendent of Police of his area. His attachment to his sons is basically influenced by the relation between two humans rather than being a familial relation of a father and sons. For him, the only possible way to assert one's existence is through his actions. There is no existence beyond actions done by individuals according to their conscience. His sons sometimes feel frustrated due to this attitude of their father. It is only his youngest son Basanta who actually gets tuned to his father's philosophy and therefore develops similar attitude.

Along with a particular mode of living, he keeps his own philosophical view of the outside world. The particular thing about him is that he does not get influenced by the outside world; rather, he influences it with his philosophy and actions. He encounters many people of different disciplines and ranks in the narrative and every time turns out to be the controller of the situation. Akin to the characters of the previous novels of Gurdial Singh, he too has to face many hardships – for instance the economic hardships and the deaths of his wife Biro and the favourite son Basanta – but, like a stoic being, he remains stable and consistent throughout the discourse.

Most of the novels of Gurdial Singh are complex in narrative construction of plots and frequently dense with wide range of ideas, actions, cultural myths, beliefs, customs etc. However, irrespective of their multifaceted nature, there is an overriding motif that cannot be ignored about Gurdial Singh's novels, i.e., the unique and remarkable portrayal of their characters.

The fundamental requirement for an analytical study is the generation of a question (or questions) in the mind as one goes on reading a text. In other words, it is

only a question or problem which gives birth to a detailed analytical study. To analyze something without having any question or problem in mind is more like undertaking a journey without knowing where to go. It is the knowledge or at least the subsistence of doubts that enforce someone to take on a strenuous study of something with deep insight and consistency. Consequently, when we read Gurdial Singh's novels, the question which time and again strikes our mind is related to the typical behaviour of his characters, especially of the protagonists. As we go on reading his novels, a particular feeling regarding the behaviour of these protagonists starts dominating our conscience. We note that the protagonists are ordinary human beings with a number of shortcomings and flaws in their personalities. They are attached to the ground realities of the agricultural set up of the rural Punjab. But irrespective of this commonness, they get amazing favour and admiration of the common populace as well as the readers and therefore establish themselves as heroes. Despite being ordinary they do not seem ordinary humans when they pass through and deal with their problematic circumstances. Behaving as heroes, they undertake some very difficult tasks and try to accomplish them without caring for the consequences. As far as the present study is concerned, it is primarily inspired by two questions: First, what is the reason behind this particular heroic behaviour of these protagonists? Second, what are those traits that make them look extraordinary as compared to their fellow beings? Before analyzing the peculiar behaviour of Gurdial Singh's characters, it would be imperative to understand the conceptualization of heroism first.

The Conceptualization of Heroism

The definitions of the word "hero" would take us to the list of those essential characteristics which are required or mandatory to have a persona whom we refer as hero, or superior to others. Etymologically, the word "hero" came to English language (via Latin) in medieval ages from the Greek *hērōs*. In Oxford dictionaries, it has been described as "a person, typically a man, who is admired for his courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities" (Oxford Dictionaries). Similarly, in various sources we find a long list of characteristics of heroes which do not vary with different cultures or civilizations such as bravery, determinedness, honesty, truthfulness, loyalty and so

on. Every culture has its own set of myths, tales, legends or songs to define its hero and to reveal who can be a hero in comparison to others.

Heroism, in itself, is a very wide topic because its conceptualization is as old as human civilization. We read in the myths and old stories of almost every civilization of the world about heroes and how their actions helped to save their nations and in this way served as a guiding source for the forthcoming generations. We read in almost all corners of the world how the actions of different gods saved humanity from falling in the hands of evil forces. People from all over the world hear from their elders how the actions of their ancestors helped their families or tribe to stand. For instance, many people in India worship their ancestors (symbolically their actions and the path they followed) on some particular days. In Punjab, some people celebrate *dasmi*⁶ in every month in remembrance of their forefathers.

The conceptualization of heroism cannot be taken only as a historical event. Peeping down the surface, we can observe that it is a part of human way of perceiving the world around them. In view of the fact that human beings have the ability to judge what is good for them (in a given situation) and for the whole mankind, they are bound by the logic to make similar judgements about human actions as well. The actions which are generally praised or considered great for the betterment of a large number of people are indeed the actions of superior beings. These superior beings are heroes.

According to Bernstein, the concept of heroism, like many others, is a high-level abstraction. It is primarily a moral concept which “requires a rational

⁶ *Dasmi* means the tenth day of the last day of lunar fortnight (*massiā*). In some Punjabi communities, this day is celebrated in the memory of their ancestors. These ancestors are worshiped in the image of *bābā shaheed*. The word “bābā” reflects the archetypal image of an old wise man and “shaheed” reflects the person who has sacrificed his life for religion, nation or some noble cause. The people use to make their *marhis* (monuments) in their farms or homes and light a *diva* (earthen lamp) on this day. On the day of *dasmi*, the senior male member of the house is treated as a persona of *bābā shaheed* and he is given new clothes (usually a *kurtā* and *pajāmā*), a turban, footwear and comb (total five things). And that member wears it on for *bābā shaheed*. First, food is given to him and then the rest of the family members take it. On this day, nobody in the house drinks liquor or have any non-vegetarian food.

philosophical system, including the principle of mind-body integration, as its proper base. Without such a basis the concept can be neither rigorously defined nor adequately understood.” For him:

A hero is... an individual of elevated moral stature and superior ability who pursues his goals indefatigably in the face of powerful antagonist(s). Because of his unbreached devotion to the good, no matter the opposition, a hero attains spiritual grandeur, even if he fails to achieve practical victory. Notice then the four components of heroism: moral greatness, ability or prowess, action in the face of opposition, and triumph in at least a spiritual, if not a physical, form. (n.p.)

From Bernstein’s definition of heroism, we infer that a hero is a protector or restorer of morality. He is the one who creates or defends the “life-promoting” values. The origin of these values lies in the spiritual realization of a hero along with his physical actions. Bernstein claims that in “Platonic-Christian tradition” man is divided into two parts, that his body belongs to the dimension of reality and “his consciousness to higher, spiritual realm.” The hero can belong to any of these two dimensions or he may be a combination of the two. However, Bernstein himself seems to be more on the side of spiritual realm (like Joseph Campbell) than physical dimensions and that is why he calls heroism a “high-level abstraction.”

Conceptually, a hero cannot exist in isolation. He needs someone (usually a powerful antagonist) with whom he can be compared. Philosophically, being a hero demands a division between what is good or ‘in-order’ and what is bad or ‘out-of-order’. He himself becomes, or at least tries to become, the representative of the accepted phenomena of goodness. Whereas villain, on the other hand, behaves as the representative of everything bad or evil who always tries to make things ‘out-of-order’. A hero is a restorer or protector of goodness and for this he obtains admiration from a large number of people. He sets examples for others and inspires the actions of his forthcoming generations. He needs problematic circumstances or adverse situations over which he would assert his control or at least struggle against them. On broader level, we can imagine a hero standing at the same place where imaginative God resides

and a villain where Satan resides. In this way, a hero is directly opposed to that phenomenon by which human beings define immorality and wickedness.

Comparison is probably the most important element for the existence of the conceptualization of heroism. Theoretically, it proffers the idea that all human beings are not equal in their qualities, behaviour, manners, or in brief, their essence (Whether these differences are innate or acquired is a separate debatable question). Nevertheless, we perceive that these differences depend on many various factors like culture, social position or decisions of individuals. These individuals behave differently even in almost similar circumstances. And these differences in their behaviour (in almost similar situations) provide the basis for a comparison between them. Those who prove themselves as superior to the others and also get acknowledgement for their actions from the public are generally termed as heroes. It is only through comparison that we can decide whether the actions of an individual are heroic or not. To understand this, let us think for a while the position of human existence on this earth. Over the centuries, human beings have developed from the barbaric way of living to sophisticated civilized beings. They have learned to protect themselves from the diseases and the effect of environmental hardships. In this way, being a human in itself is being a hero in comparison to the other species that exist in this universe. Man has proved himself as superior in degree and manners in comparisons to all other species (many of them are even stronger in strength and larger in size than human beings) with his courage, intelligence or skills.

Different philosophers and intellectuals have expressed their views about heroism in different contexts. They are different in their approaches and even have used various sources in order to support their arguments. It is not possible to include each and everything in our study which has been said and discussed about heroism in the different corners of the world. But we would positively like to reconsider all those ideas of major thinkers which have helped shaping the conceptualization of heroism. Most of the philosophers did not discuss heroism as an exclusive concept. Nevertheless their ideas, which are sometimes too significant to be ignored, generate some of the

basic formulations of the concept of heroism. For example Aristotle talks about heroes through his conception of the role of the characters in a literary (poetical) work.

In the second paragraph of the *Poetics* Aristotle speaks of the differences in works of fiction which are caused by the different elevations of the characters in them. In some fictions, he says, the characters are better than we are, in others worse, in still others on the same level. This passage has not received much attention from modern critics, as the importance Aristotle assigns to goodness and badness seems to indicate a somewhat narrowly moralistic view of literature. Aristotle's words for good and bad, however, are *spoudaios* and *phaulos*, which have a figurative sense of weighty and light. In literary fictions the plot consists of somebody doing something. The somebody, if an individual, is the hero, and the something he does or fails to do is what he can do, or could have done, on the level of the postulates made about him by the author and the consequent expectations of the audience. Fictions, therefore, may be classified, not morally, but by the hero's power of action, which may be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same. (Frye 33)

Aristotle's conception of heroism is concealed in the "weighty" characters who undertake such actions which are difficult, out-of-reach of an ordinary man or often impossible for the common populace. Aristotle makes the actions of average human beings (which according to him is often trivial) as the criteria of judging the actions of a hero. But this criterion of Aristotle has a serious flaw in defining what are the possibilities and capacities of an average human being (against whom the actions of a hero can be judged) because every individual is different in capacities, skills and intellectual power. Before judging what are the nature of those actions which are "greater than ours," we need to define a common point (or a limit) beyond which the actions can be defined as "greater" or heroic. Therefore Aristotle's conception about the actions of a hero, or a superior being is not reliable because it has problems in defining what are "our" actions or in other words what is the limit of the actions of an ordinary being (against which we can judge whether they are "greater" or "less" than that of "ours").

Northrop Frye, on the basis of Aristotle's division of characters, divides European history of literature (especially fiction) into three main phases: Ancient, Medieval and Modern. In ancient times, the form of narrative was primarily Myth; in

medieval ages, the form of narrative was Romance, and in modern times, the form of narrative is Novel or Short Story. Frye classifies heroes according to their actions and position in different genres. He says:

1. If superior in kind both to other men and to the environment of other men, the hero is a divine being, and the story about him will be a myth in the common sense of a story about a god.
2. If superior in degree to other men and to his environment, the hero is the typical hero of romance, whose actions are marvellous but who is himself identified as a human being. The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended: prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural to him, and enchanted weapons, talking animals, terrifying ogres and witches, and talismans of miraculous power violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established. Here we have moved from myth, properly so called, into legend, folk tale, *märchen*, and their literary affiliates and derivatives.
3. If superior in degree to other men but not to his natural environment, the hero is a leader. He has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours, but what he does is subject both to social criticism and to the order of nature. This is the hero of the *high mimetic* mode, of most epic and tragedy, and is primarily the kind of hero that Aristotle had in mind.
4. If superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience. This gives us the hero of the *low mimetic* mode, of most comedy and of realistic fiction. (33-34)

Frye talks about heroes in the context of different Genres and how their actions help determine their categories. In Frye's classification, there is a journey of a hero from god to an ordinary man. He shows that it has happened in the course of historical development of different literary genres. However, Frye himself acknowledges that the elements of these categories are so closely associated with each other that it is not possible to separate each category from the other exclusively. He says, "Where a religion is mythological and polytheistic, where there are promiscuous incarnations, deified heroes and kings of divine descent, where the same adjective 'godlike' can be applied either to Zeus or to Achilles, it is hardly possible to separate the mythical, romantic, and *high mimetic* strands completely" (34).

In his article “The Philosophical Foundation of Heroism,” Andrew Bernstein describes different types of heroes “who pursue rational values in the teeth of every form of opposition.” He argues that heroes are born with some specific characteristics which differentiate them “from the folks next door.” He possesses exceptional abilities or prowess which is “a critical component of a hero’s make-up.” Heroism, by its nature, is reserved for the man set apart – for “the selected few who tower above the rest.” He writes:

Some are predominantly physicalistic heroes, some primarily intellectual, some are excellent examples of the principle of mind-body integration; some are grand scale characters towering through a work of fiction, whether on the printed page, stage or screen – while some perform their great and notable deeds in actual existence.... And yet, through the teeming multiplicity of individualized differences, there runs a recurrent thread, a distinguishing essence that unites them all into a common classification, as differentiated from their antipode, from the mundane, the trivial, the everyday, the pedestrian, the non-heroic – or worse, from the evil, the villainous, the anti-heroic. (n.p.)

The biggest objection which can be raised against Bernstein’s conception of heroism is: Do heroes really belong to an elite class? Or is it possible, at any stage, to segregate the concept of heroism from the reach of ordinary human beings or in Bernstein’s own words “from the folk next door.” If this was the case (let us imagine from the point of view of Bernstein), we need to evolve a new definition in order to explain the actions of Dulla Bhatti, Jeona Maur or Francisco Sebaté. Or we need to redefine the whole concept of heroism in their context because they all belonged to extremely ordinary agrarian families and have been designated as heroes by the people of their respective cultures. Heroism is not a bunch of qualities to be found in a unique figure. It also depends upon the circumstances or the situations. In other words, every problematic circumstances or adverse situation contains in itself a possibility of giving birth to a hero. The bigger or the more cumbersome the problem is, the greater the hero would be. Since these problematic circumstances or adverse situations are unavoidable part of ordinary life, heroism too, then, by default becomes an essential part of it. We acknowledge this fact that a hero is a superior being in degree and manner from other

beings but it does not correspond to the notion that he cannot be a part of routine life. A hero becomes or behaves like a 'hero' in particular problematic circumstances but it is possible that he lives the rest of his life in quite simple manners as the other people of his culture do.

Thomas Gramstad is also discontented with this "bereavement of heroism from humanity at large." For him, "heroism is a part of human nature, not the exclusive property of an elite." He further comments:

Neither rational selfishness nor morality nor courage (the building blocks of heroism) are elitist concepts. Everyone can be an egoist, a moral person, or a courageous person. The degree can and will vary, as is the case with all forms of competence and achievement. I do not accept that the upper end of the scale shall be cut off and placed in a superhuman realm, inaccessible to and separate from humanity at large. Instead, I propose an unbreached, continuous scale of heroism.

Heroism, as it is depicted in art and literature, as well as in life, comes in a large continuous range of degrees and dimensions. Here I will focus on two extreme ends of the scale. I call these the Everyday Hero and the Epic Hero. (n.p.)

For Gramstad, the "Everyday Hero is the more or less ordinary person who gets into trouble, probably not by his own choosing, and rises to the occasion, actualizing the best of their slumbering and unknown potentials in the process. This hero seems familiar and realistic in that he could have been one of the neighbours, and because we are told about his confusions, conflicts and development from time to time." He is positive and inspiring through his familiarity and through the description of a gradual personal development that may provide one with clear ideas about steps to be taken in order to become heroic, to realize one's possibilities. He in this way emerges as a role model for the common populace.

The Epic Hero, by contrast, is out of the world in which we live and in this way he is larger than life. He is "an extraordinary person in extraordinary situations and difficulties, but handling it all apparently without any serious problems. The Epic Hero goes or rather flies through life with panache, grandeur and in big-time style" (Gramstad). He is "positive and inspiring through the images and emotions being

evoked, the impossible dream that suddenly becomes real and concrete. S/he is not really a role model, but rather a fertilizer that will prepare the ground so that role models may find a place to take root - an image that evokes the desire for heroic being” (Gramstad).

Gramstad believes that the world of Epic Hero is the world of symbolism and the world of Everyday Hero is all reality or realism. He does not give much importance to these different categories. However, his main thrust is on the combination of these two categories. He says:

The issue is a balance between, or rather an integration of, realism and symbolism. Realism is the vehicle you make that will carry you in the direction you want to go. Symbolism is the stars in the sky that can tell you the direction.

We need both; the symbolism and the realism, the Epic Hero and the Everyday Hero. We don't need both in each text or each work of art, but we need a diet that contains both, and we need to identify their fundamental connection, as constituents of the same structure, points on the same scale. Without the latter we will become escapists; and without the former we will become buried in the nitty-gritty of everyday life and lose the perspective and the emotional fuel that help us keep going.
(n.p.)

Apart from these classifications, there are many other categories of heroes which can be made in order to narrow down the discussions or to undertake a particular area of analysis about heroism such as Mythical Hero, Cultural Hero, Superhero, Romantic Hero, Folk Hero, Byronic Hero, Archetypal Hero, Patriotic Hero, Symbolic Hero and so on. Our concern in this study is not to add another category (say Gurdialian Hero like Byronic hero) in the already existing list of categories but to grasp the general spirit of heroism in different conditions of human existence proposed by Gurdial Singh in his four novels i.e. *The Last Flicker*, *Survivors*, *Night of the Half Moon* and *Parsa*.

We are aware of the fact that a parallel argument can be raised against the significance of these categories. In every problematic circumstance or adverse situation, as we have discussed earlier also, there remains a hidden possibility of giving

birth to a hero. A hero is the one who tames or at least struggles to control the adverse situations. Since there can be infinite number of adverse human situations, there are infinite possibilities of emerging heroes. There can be a different hero for every different era, every country or even every culture. Therefore, there can be as many categories possible as we wish to make. In other words, it becomes more important and primary to notice who a hero is rather than to know which kind of a hero he is.

Keeping in mind the possibility of numerous categories of heroism, we believe that there runs a common cord among these different categories which binds them to a single concept. This common cord can generally be referred to as a heroic spirit which we find in almost every category. The present study aims at grasping this heroic spirit present in the protagonists of Gurdial Singh's four famous novels i.e. *The Last Flicker*, *The Survivors*, *Night of the Half Moon* and *Parsa*. It also attempts to bring to the fore the individualities of the characters, their personal worlds; how Gurdial Singh has created characters as prototypes of Punjabi Culture; how the internal conditions of the characters have been assimilated with outside world; and how the concepts like self-esteem and dignity (*anakh*) emerge through the interaction of the 'self' with the cultural assumptions of the image of a hero. The primary question this study deals with is: how these characters, while passing through different phases of their lives, attain the status of heroes. When we deeply observe the behaviour of Gurdial Singh's protagonists, we find that they possess a typical attitude towards their lives. Their particular behaviour reminds us of the behaviour of the legendary heroes of Punjab. We can feel the same spirit of heroism in Jagseer, Bishna, Daya Kaur, Modan and Parsa as we feel it in Jagga Daku, Sucha Surma, Dulla Bhatti, Jeona Maur and Mirza. Their personal, social and political aims or conditions might be different but they all seem to be tied to a single underlying common cord. It is equally important to know that this common cord does not exist in isolation as an independent identity but has its deep roots in the culture of Punjab.

The Conceptualization of Heroism in the Context of Legendary Heroes of Punjab and Gurdial Singh's Protagonists' Assimilation to It.

As far as the conceptualization of heroism in the context of the legendary heroes of Punjab is concerned, three major domains demand special concentration. These three domains are: (a) hero as a rebel (b) hero as a mythical and cultural construct (c) hero as an existential being. These are not different categories of heroes but the division has been made only for the convenience of analysing the behaviour of characters in a systematic order. Moreover these three domains keep on interacting and complementing each others and it is very difficult to separate one from the other when we see it as a whole. In this way, the approach that the present study follows is more or less eclectic. The thrust of the present study is not to apply a ready-made theory on some given texts (or to find theoretical similarities between different texts) but to demonstrate the personal and social build-ups of the characters in the background of the culture of Punjab. While doing this, a number of different ideas of the major approaches like *Mythic and Archetypal*, *Historical Exploration*, *Psychoanalysis*, *Dialogism*, *Structuralism*, *Existentialism*, *Deconstruction* etc. have been taken into consideration wherever they help us to explore the intricacies of the particular behaviour of the characters. Each dealing with a particular novel, the present study has been divided into four main chapters: (i) *The last Flicker: A Tale of Metaphysical Rebellion*, (ii) *The Survivors: A Narrative of Resistance*, (iii) *Night of the Half Moon: A Heroic Journey of a Peasant*, (iv) *Parsa: An Expression of Stoicism*. However the primary focus remains to grasp the underlying heroic spirit of the protagonists in their different problematic and existential situations.

The major part of the present study is dominated by the first domain in which most of the protagonists of Gurdial Singh have been demonstrated as rebelling against the establishment which is determined to demolish their existence as free human beings. The theoretical assumptions for the conceptualization of hero as a rebel have been taken primarily from Albert Camus' ideas about rebellion which according to him is internal to human conditions, and Hobsbaum's ideas about banditry in which he

legitimizes the existence of banditry in some societies where it plays an active role for the development of human conditions in general.

Let us first start with explaining what it means to be a hero as a rebel. Initially, it would be imperative to think about those conditions which prepare the background for the emergence of a hero as a rebel. As we all know, the major element that influences the behaviour of the people is the history of that particular area. In the course of historical development, there happen certain incidents which modify the behaviour of people. As the time rolls on, this modified behaviour reveals itself through different cultural contours. We would like to explain it in the context of the history of Punjab. Punjab is located in the North Western part of India, the only possible way to enter India by land. The Southern part of India is surrounded by the sea. The Himalaya detaches India from China and other East Asian countries. Before eighteenth century (when travelling by air was not there and by sea no so common and difficult also), land was the only feasible medium for travelling. However, because of its fertile land, appropriate climate and natural resources, it had been attracting foreign invaders for many centuries. Punjab⁷, due to its geographical location, was the opening door for invaders. Each invader, either he came to loot or settle in India, came through this way. It was the people of Punjab who had to bear the brunt of every invader. The social life did not get a sufficient long time to stabilize itself and most of the time it remained strained. We can imagine the restlessness among the people of that time by the proverb “khādā pitā lāhe dā, bāki Ehmād shāhe dā⁸.” But the important thing in

⁷ Punjab here means the geographical location of Punjab before partition (roughly covering the area between the rivers the Sindh and the Ganges).

⁸ “After the assassination of Nadir in 1747, one of his officers named Ahmad Shah, an Afghan chief of the Abdali clan, rose to power and succeeded in establishing himself as the independent ruler of Afghanistan. He styled himself Durr-i-Durrān, ‘the pearl of the age’, and his clan was henceforth known as the Durrani. Ahmad Shah Abdali, while accompanying Nadir to India, had seen with his own eyes ‘the weakness of the Empire, the imbecility of the Emperor, the inattentiveness of the ministers, the spirit of independence which had crept among the grandees’. So after establishing his power at home he led several expeditions into India from 1748 AD till 1767 AD..... He sought to consolidate his authority at home by increasing his reputation through successful foreign adventures, and he also hoped to utilize

this whole situation was that the people did not remain passive during these invasions. They resisted bravely in spite of their small numbers as compared to the large, well organized and trained armed forces of the invaders. The major occupation of the people of this area was agriculture and due to the hard physical work on the fields, they usually had strong physiques. In some of the invasions, they gave such a hard fight to the invaders that they had to go back from here. Our purpose here is not to go into the historical details of these invasions but to concentrate on their effect on the general behaviour of the people. These continuous invasions developed a kind of particular spirit of resistance against injustice among the people of this area. Under the effect of this spirit of resistance, they did not passively accept injustice and used to stand against the authorities time and again. This spirit of resistance and rebellion against injustice can also be noticed in the legendary heroes of Punjab such as Dulla Bhatti, Jagger Daku, Sucha, Jeona Maur, Mirza and so on.

The spirit of resistance against authorities can be noticed even today in many legends, folk tales and the songs of Punjab. The people also welcomed those who resisted bravely against an authority, irrespective of its strength and influence. They might have been regarded as the criminals according to the law or the system of their times but in accordance to the public opinion, they were generally termed as the heroes, the men superior in degree and manners to his fellow beings. The most perceptible example of this spirit of resistance can be noticed in the behaviour of Mirza, the most cherished legendary romantic hero of Punjab. According to the legend of Mirza Sahiban by Peelu, Mirza took birth in medieval ages when India was ruled by Muslim emperors. Both Mirza and Sahiban were sent to the same mosque for studying Quran⁹. Peelu writes:

the booty derived from his Indian campaigns in defraying the expenses of his army and in showering favours and rewards on the Afghan chiefs” (Mohsini). Due to these continuous invasions, the people of Punjab started believing that there is no use of saving anything because it would be looted by the troops of Ahmad Shah Abdali. They considered it better to spend their savings on eatables. That is why they used to say: *khādā pitā lāhe dā, bāki Ehmād shāhe dā*.

⁹. The denotative meaning of Quran is ‘to recite’, ‘read’ or ‘the book worthy of reading’.

ਸਾਹਿਬਾਂ ਪੜ੍ਹੇ ਪੱਟੀਆਂ, ਮਿਰਜ਼ਾ ਪੜ੍ਹੇ ਕੁਰਾਨ।

ਵਿੱਚ ਮਸੀਤ ਦੇ ਲੱਗੀਆਂ, ਜਾਣੇ ਕੁਲ ਜਹਾਨ।

...

ਪੜ੍ਹਨਾ ਸਾਡਾ ਰਹਿ ਗਿਆ, ਲੈ ਆਏ ਇਸ਼ਕ ਲਿਖਾ।

...

ਕਾਜ਼ੀ ਸਾਡਾ ਮਰ ਗਿਆ, ਸੁੰਨੀ ਪਈ ਮਸੀਤ। (ਗੁਮਟਾਲਾ 75)

(Sahiban reads the slates, while Mirza recites Quran.

Intimacy developed in mosque, know the entire world around.

...

Study left behind, with love we were blessed.

...

Our *Kāzi* has died, the mosque remains deserted.)

Through the medium of Quran, the principles, axioms and moral values of Islam were taught to the children at that time. It advocated the notion of complete submission and devotion to the doctrines of Islam. In those conditions, the use of mosque as a place of love, ignorance of the study of Quran, refusal to the Islamic doctrines and declaration of the death of *kāzi* are the symbols of resistance or rebellion against the dominant Islamic ideology (Khahra 91).

Sahiban's father fixes her marriage against her wish to Tahar *Chandhar*. Through Karmu Brahman, Sahiban sends a message to Mirza in which she asks him to take her away secretly before her marriage. Against the wish of all his family members (including his father, sister and sisters-in-law), Mirza decides to go to Sahiban's village to bring her home. His father initially pleads him not to go but when Mirza does not listen to his advices, he warns him as:

ਰਸਤੇ ਪੈ ਜਾਓ ਰਾਹੀਓ! ਡੰਡੀ ਪੈਰ ਨਾ ਘੱਤ। (ਗੁਮਟਾਲਾ 79)

(O traveler, be on the right path! Don't go on trail)

The Punjabi word “dandi (ਡੰਡੀ)” has been developed from the word “dand (ਦੰਡ)” which means punishment (Khahra 92). Mirza's father gives him warning by giving reference to the punishment that he would receive if he chooses the trail by leaving the main path. Choosing the trail instead of the correct path (as according to

the Islamic Ideology) is another symbol of Mirza's resistance to the dominant ideology of his time.

In another incident, Sahiban makes fun of Mirza's *bakki*¹⁰ due to its weak physique and short body structure. Sahiban's father Khiva Khan was an economically well established person who was very fond of keeping superior quality horses. Sahiban suggestively makes Mirza to realize that his *bakki* cannot compete with the horses of his father. Mirza replies:

ਬੱਕੀ ਤੋਂ ਡਰਨ ਫਰੇਸ਼ਤੇ, ਮੈਥੋਂ ਡਰੇ ਖੁਦ। (ਗੁਮਟਾਲਾ 79)

(Angels are frightened of *bakki*, god is frightened of me)

In the context of medieval Punjabi narratives, Mirza is the only hero who openly challenges the highest pillars of dominant religious and political establishments. The word "Islam"¹¹ means complete "submission" to the will of God (Oxford Dictionaries). In the medieval age, God was situated at the highest place in the hierarchy of the power structures. The second place was of angels who were believed to be made of God's serene splendor and therefore considered superior to human beings. Mirza's declaration of the superiority of his *bakki* over the angels and the presentation of himself as more powerful than god are the obvious symbols of resistance and rebellion against any kind of establishment (Khahra 94). Notwithstanding this peculiar attitude, Mirza gains tremendous popularity among the common populace and consequently emerges as the greatest folk-hero of Punjab. Mirza's stance, especially in the context of social, religious and political conditions of his time, is astonishing, unusual and rebellious.

In the mid twentieth century, Albert Camus, the famous French philosopher, after reading numerous historical and philosophical texts, discussed at length the conceptualization of rebellion and its importance in human life in his book *The Rebel*. He agrees that the world in which we are living is absurd because we have "no higher

¹⁰ Bakki means a kind of mare that is physically weak and for this reason often compared to a mule.

¹¹ Etymologically the word has been taken from Arabic '*islam*' which means 'submission' or from '*islama*' which means 'submit (to God)'.

value to direct our action” (Camus, *The Rebel* 13). Man has become conscious of his actual position on this earth. God has lost his privileged position in this new world of man. And man has started believing in “nothing,” and for him “nothing” makes any sense. Things are happening without any reason and man is thrown in this world alone and without any purpose. In this absurd world, nothing is true or false, good or bad and nothing is important. We have to live in this world because we do not have any other option. Camus believes that due to these absurd ideas or way of thinking and living, “man is in danger of falling into nihilism” (Todd x). In this way, man of today is ready to fall into a world of eternal despair and isolation. Since he is unable to return to God, he must take a step ahead to this nihilistic pull. And this step, according to Camus, is none other than the act of rebellion. For him, “The will to fight injustices can counterbalance the nihilistic temptation” (Todd x). Therefore, it is only the will to rebel against what is wrong in this world that can provide meaning to man’s existence and can help him to come out of the darkness of nihilism. With the publication of *The Rebel*, writes Olivier Todd, Camus had moved from what he called a philosophy of the Absurd to Revolt. His ‘cycle’ of the Absurd carried a kind of pessimism. He was now trying to go beyond it” (vii).

According to Camus, rebel is a person who has the courage to say “no” to any kind of situation where he is treated as an oppressed being. It is the situation from where he starts believing that there is something in man which should be treated with respect and at least at equal level. He confidently believes that his position as a rebel is justified because it has some values which are superior to the values of the oppressor. In the words of Olivier Todd:

Camus claimed that the rebel is a man who says no, because he wants to defend what has to be defended in Man. True to a literary and metaphysical mood, very much in the continental French rationalist tradition, Camus substituted ‘I rebel therefore we are’ for Descartes’ ‘I think therefore I am’. Solitude in an absurd world could turn into significant solidarity. (x)

In Camus’ conceptualization of rebellion, it is significant to note that an individual act of rebellion does not exist in isolation (i.e. exclusively as a separate

event) but ultimately becomes the destiny of all men in general. It can become the destiny of all men only if their sufferings are shared (or at least taken to be as a collective experience) and not regarded as individuals' afflictions.

If an individual actually consents to die, and, when the occasion arises, accepts death as a consequence of his rebellion, he demonstrates that he is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of a common good which he considers more important than his own destiny. If he prefers the risk of death to a denial of the rights that he defends, it is because he considers that the latter are more important than he is. He acts, therefore, in the name of certain values which are still indeterminate but which he feels are common to himself and to all men. We see that the affirmation implicit in each act of revolt is extended to something which transcends the individual in so far as it removes him from his supposed solitude and supplies him with reason to act.... The slave asserts himself for the sake of everyone in the world when he comes to the conclusion that a command has infringed on something inside him that does not belong to him alone, but which he has in common with other men – even with the man who insults and oppresses him. (Camus, *The Rebel* 21-22)

This is the point where Camus contradicts man's position as an absurd being and stands in favour of him as a rebel. Rebellion is the next step of absurdity. Absurdity conceives despair and meaninglessness in human life while rebellion is full of humanity (because it encourages man to act, even in absurd conditions) and therefore eventually turns out to be a purposeful act. Camus says that "in absurdist experience suffering is individual. But from the moment that a movement of rebellion begins, suffering is seen as a collective experience – as the experience of everyone" (Camus, *The Rebel* 28). To rebel is to go beyond one's present absurd conditions. At this point, we observe a striking similarity between the ideas of Camus and Sartre's concept of "transubstantiation." He makes his point clear with the help of an example of a coloured member of the ground crew at an air base on the outskirts of London. Because he is coloured, the laws of his country forbid him ever to become a member of the flying personnel. "This prohibition becomes for him a *subjective* impoverishment" (Sartre, *Search for a Method* 95). He takes a plane, with no experience as a pilot, and flies it across the channel. "...his act is a rebellion, a refusal to accept the condition which society has imposed upon him.... But it is at the same time an expression of his

class and the present state of its self-conscious movement toward liberation. The pilot indicates more than himself by his act” (Barnes xii). Sartre calls it the process of “internalizing the external” conditions. After the act of rebellion, when the pilot is still in the plane and flying it, he objectifies his own action in the “totalization” of history. Sartre in this way goes a step further when he says that after the act of rebellion, there occurs “negation of negation.”

Rebellion does not mean an arbitrary act of violence. It certainly has a value system which leads a rebel to protest “against his condition and against the whole of creation. It is metaphysical because it disputes the ends of man and of creation... the metaphysical rebel protests against the human condition in general” (Camus, *The Rebel* 29). It is therefore possible that in some cases a person does not look like a rebel hero by his physical appearance, actions, gestures or body language but still he may have a heroic spirit. In this case the heroic spirit works on metaphysical level. For instance, in Gurdial Singh’s *The Last Flicker*, Jagseer appears to us, at least on the surface level, a weak, vulnerable and miserable character who is being victimised by his master Bhanta. He does not take any violent step or action against his oppressors to overthrow his conditions of existence. But on metaphysical level, he keeps on fighting and resisting those powers that are determined to make him feel that he belongs to a lower class and therefore, an inferior being. Throughout the discourse, he does not accept himself as belonging to any kind of inferior state. His heroic spirit does not allow him to accept his oppressive state and continue living without any self-respect or personal dignity. Therefore he shares that common cord which binds him to the concept of a rebel hero at metaphysical level.

Outlawry or social banditry, according to Eric Hobsbawm, is another form of a rebellion which generally takes place in agrarian societies against the landlords or the oppressive structures of the State.

Bandits, by definition, resist obedience, are outside the range of power, are potential rebels. Indeed the original (Italian) meaning of *bandito* is a man ‘placed outside the law’ for whatever reason.... (Hobsbawm 12)

Banditry is universally found “wherever societies are based on agriculture (including pastoral economies), and consist largely of peasants and landless labourers ruled, oppressed and exploited by someone else – lords, towns, governments, lawyers, or even banks” (Hobsbawm 23). He particularly relates the concept of social banditry to agrarian societies because, according to him, it is quite different in composition and mode of operation from “the criminal underworld of urban or vagrant elements” (Hobsbawm 42). In his words:

For the law, anyone belonging to a group of men who attack or rob with violence is a bandit, from those who snatch payrolls at an urban street corner to organized insurgents or guerrillas who happen not to be officially recognized as such. They are today apt to be described, equally uncritically, as ‘terrorists’, a sign of the historic decline of the bandit image in the second half of the twentieth century. (19)

Akin to the conceptualization of rebellion, social banditry too has a value system. It aims at restoration of “the traditional order of things ‘as it should be’ (which in traditional societies means as it is believed to have been in some real or mythical past)” (Hobsbawm 29). In this way, they play the role of social reformers while at the same time, paradoxically, remain in conflict with the law of the territory (which is supposed to maintain the order and justice) in which they live. For instance, Dulla Bhatti, recognised as a bandit according to the authorities of that time, helped many poor families and their girls to get married. “It would be unthinkable for a social bandit to snatch the peasants’ (though not the lords’) harvest in his own territory, or perhaps even elsewhere” (Hobsbawm 20). Social bandits take the responsibility of the restoration of morality. They undertake violent actions in order to correct what according to them is not fair. Robbery, for them, does not stand for the source of income but an act of social justice through which they would return money to those from whom it has been earned by unfair means. They, though unconsciously, correspond to the mythic image of Robin Hood who used to loot from the rich to give it to the poor. About the role of bandits in agrarian societies, Hobsbawm writes:

They right wrongs, they correct and avenge cases of injustice, and in doing so apply a more general criterion of just and fair relations between men in general, and especially between the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak. (30)

This zeal to “correct and avenge cases of injustice” turns a rebel into a folk hero. People at large accept a rebel as their hero because for them he fights for a noble cause. He undertakes those actions which they themselves dream or aspire to do. From the point of view of a psychologist, Hamlet does not take any action against his uncle because (under *Oedipus Complex*) he himself wanted the similar results. In the similar manner, commoners do not consider these social rebels (however violent or brutal they might be in their actions) as criminals but on the contrary, always bestow respect to them because they themselves have wanted the similar results. The actions of rebel heroes in this way become the expressions of the hidden or suppressed feelings of the common people. Consequently a social rebel becomes a symbol who “seeks to establish or to re-establish justice or ‘the old ways’¹², that is to say, fair dealing in the society of oppression” (Hobsbawm 60).

If a typical brigand wants a long career he must be or show himself to be a philanthropist, even as he kills and robs to the best of his ability. Otherwise he risks losing popular sympathy and being taken for a common murderer or robber. (Sanctis)

From the above discussion, it can be easily conferred that a rebel plays dual role in society. On the one hand, he kills or robs and on the other, he helps and loves people. Having a conscience that commiserates with the deprived and a heart that never submits, he presents himself as the source of justice. He works on the principle: “There is just or legitimate killing and unjust, unnecessary and wanton murder; there are honourable and shameful acts” (Hobsbawm 52). The rebel hero is the one who prefers “legitimate killing” and condemns “wanton murder.”

Pash is a famous Punjabi poet who captures this spirit of rebellion in his poetry. The image of a rebellious person created in his poetry takes us close to the image of a rebel hero. He pulls man out of the darkness of absurdity and nihilism and fills him

¹². According to Hobsbawm, ‘the old ways’ means “the ‘straight’ society of the peasants including the peasants bandits functioned in terms of ‘law’ – God’s law and the common custom, which was different from the state’s or the lord’s law, but nevertheless a social order. And in so far as it conceived of a better society it thought of it as the return to an old law or even, at moments, the advance to a new law which might bring not only true justice but freedom” (Hobsbawm 180).

with a spirit to fight against injustice. To accept injustice, for him, is another mode of being a part of it. Man must fight in order to get his rights otherwise he has no right to blame others for spreading injustice. Pash was deeply influenced by the Naxalite upsurge, which flourished in India during 1960s, and therefore most of his poems are embedded with the ideas of rebellion and revolution.

It was under the impact of the Naxalite upsurge that Pash set upon his ideological orientation. A precious and inquisitive mind as he had from the very beginning, he did not rest content with the complex of ideas this upsurge forwarded for bringing about a political revolution in the country.... No doubt, India of the sixties had terrain ready for this sort of ideology to catch the fancy of the excitable youth and the subaltern people. After all, the whole promise, that democratic institutions, educational programmes, and industrialising projects had held for bringing a socialist society, had vanished into thin air. Instead, economic inequality, corruption and bureaucratisation had grown to spread discontent all around. (Gill 14-19)

Pash wrote many vigorous poems in which he justifies the use of all those methods to end injustice which are not permitted by the laws of the state. According to him, there is nothing wrong if the scythe of a farmer (generally used to cut crops) is used to cut the throat of his exploiter. Through his poems, he asks poor farmers, landless labourers and subalterns to turn away from the traditional way of living with loyalty and faithfulness towards their masters. Instead, they must get ready to be in action to claim their rights. In his famous poem “In Pursuit of Flying Eagles” he says:

Eagles have flown aloft taking in their beaks

Our desire for a moment's life of peace.

Friends, let us indeed,

In pursuit of the flying eagles, proceed

....

Before the daily expanding building

Of the police-station—

To take into grasp your village, your family

The trembling leaf of your self-respect –
 Gets glued to the daily record
 Of that rapier-tongued munshi;
 It is better now indeed,
 In pursuit of the flying eagles, proceed. (Gill 88)

In this intensely symbolic poem, Pash seems to be pleading to his countrymen to adopt the way of revolution. Before it is too late, before their freedom is lost in the name of police-rule, before their self-respect is hurt due to a premeditated economic crisis, it is time for them to take up the arms and fight against their exploiters. He further says:

Those who have seen golden corncobs
 Of maize drying on our roofs,
 But have not come across
 Contracting prices in the market,
 Will never come to grasp
 The enmity professed
 By that ruling woman in Delhi
 With this bare footed village damsel.
 In this dungeon of life
 When your voice to yourself returns,
 Dreams like the unstruck neck of the old ox
 In rankling eyes burn,
 And the dirt of the streets sticks
 To life's most beautiful years;
 Then the best thing to do
 Is, friends, indeed,

In pursuit of the flying eagles, proceed. (Gill 88)

The poet indirectly indicates the naïve attitude of farmers who feel happy when they see their ripened crops. But the irony of the situation is that they are unable to understand the future strategies of the government through which the prices of the crops will be reduced. The farmers at this present stage are not aware of the decreasing rates of their crops in the market which would indirectly enhance the chances of the exploitation of their labour by the authorities. They are so naïve that they are unable to understand the strategies of the “ruling woman in Delhi¹³” and what effect will they create on the “bare footed village damsel.” The image of a “bare footed village damsel” symbolically represents the deprived women in villages, poor farmers, and landless labourers. Therefore the only way left for them, before the valueless hard labour devour their youth, is to stand against their oppressors. In his another notable poem “*Sab Ton Khatarnak* (Ominous),” he says:

Ominous is in fact

To be filled with dead silence,

Lose concern and bear all things unconcerned,

To become the slave of routine’

Ominous is in fact

The death of our dreams. (Gill 103)

For Pash, to accept injustice indifferently is equal to death. He believes in the importance of struggle. For him, to accept one’s death fighting against tyrants is much more valuable than passively bearing the disgrace of an inferior being. He therefore is one such poet who lucratively captures that spirit of resistance or rebellion which we may find, though in many various ways, in the legendary heroes of Punjab.

Our concern, in the present study, is to see whether the characters of Gurdial Singh’s selected novels share some space with the image of these social rebels or they are just common murderers or “vagrant elements.” As we have already mentioned,

¹³ The “ruling woman in Delhi” suggests Indira Gandhi who, at that time, was the Prime Minister of India.

Jagseer, Bishna, Modan and Parsa do not accept the situations as it is offered by the outside world. They instead create their own ways which are different and often untraditional in many ways. They rebel against the conditions of their existence because according to their conscience they are not based upon what we understand by a common term 'justice'. They, more or less, live for 'what it should be' rather than for 'what it is'.

Jagseer, in *The Last Flicker*, rebels against his condition of existence in which he is treated as an inferior being. There are a number of reasons why he could not get married. First, his mother had married his father against the wishes of her parents and of her clan; second, he is an outcast and therefore belongs to the lower section of society; third, he does not have any other source of income except a small piece of land given by his master (even that was taken back by Bhanta later). All these reasons create an unfriendly atmosphere around him which ultimately makes him feel that his contribution to and existence in society does not carry any importance. He rebels against his present condition of existence (which is without self-esteem and essential human dignity) and his rebellion ultimately turns out against an individual's unnoticed presence in society. Bishna, in *The Survivors*, rebels against the establishment which is determined to impose its decisions on the freedom of the individuals. According to him, to eliminate someone from his ancestral house against his wish is injustice and he is determined to fight against this injustice. Without caring for the strength of the opposition, he obstinately demands his rights. Modan, in *Night of the Half Moon*, reflects the image of a social rebel when he presents himself as a source of social justice. His father, a noble man, was trickily insulted by Ghana (due to which he dies afterwards) which, according to cultural and moral standards, is an act of unjust. This "wanton murder" committed by Ghana instigates Modan to rebel against his suppressed conditions. Consequently, Modan violently kills Ghana. Our concern, in the present study, is to evaluate whether the action of Modan, in which he kills Ghana, comes under the category of "legitimate killing" or "wanton murder." Parsa is another such character who does not acknowledge any law of the outside world which directs him to behave in a particular way. He creates his own space outside the village and

prefers living according to the norms set by his own conscience. Therefore, all these characters, in one way or the other, share the spirit of rebellion with the social rebels.

Our next area of concern is to see a rebel hero as a mythical and cultural construct. Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* discusses a heroic image by various symbols taken from the myths of the different corners of the world. He demonstrates the underlying connection between the stories of the mythical heroes and the psychological effects generated by them. Inspired by the idea that myths create an important impact on human psyche, the present study treats myths as the most influential source of determining the particular behaviour of heroes. It is not difficult, especially for those who belong to or are acquainted with Punjabi culture, to understand that the typical behaviour of the protagonists is not only an individual trait but also has its roots in the mythical, cultural and historical background of the region. Myths are the first and probably the most influential source whose impact the people of an area take on themselves. Though they affect at unconscious level yet their impact can be felt and seen in the real actions of the people of that particular region. The dominant Indian philosophy of *karma-dharma*¹⁴, for instance, has been influenced by the different incidents of Mahabharata and Ramayana. There would be no exaggeration if we say that the culture of a particular region is primarily created by the myths of that area. Culture and myths of an area remain in dialogic relationship, both creating and expressing each other.

According to Campbell myths play very important role in what we think and how we organise our thoughts. It is not possible to reach at a conclusion of any conceptualization without taking into consideration its origin and how it has been manifested in the stories of our fore-fathers. The same is true for the conceptualization of heroism. For Campbell:

¹⁴ *Karma* literally means “action” and *Dharma* means “religion.” In Hindu mythology, a lot of importance has been given to *karma*. It is the *karmas* (actions) of a person that determine his *dharma* (religion).

... myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religion, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth. (Campbell 21)

Campbell believes that a hero is not a person but a soul, a spirit which dies only to be reborn. According to him, a hero passes through different phases in his journey towards heroism. At initial stage, hero is an everyday man who remains ready for “separation” from his fellowmen at a call to go on an adventure. He starts his journey and enters “a region of supernatural wonder.” There he fights against evil forces and many a time is helped by God himself. The hero returns after a decisive victory over his enemies and bestows boons of his victory on his fellowmen. It means there are mainly three stages in the life of a hero i.e. “*separation – initiation – return*” (Campbell 48). In support of his argument, he says:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.... Prometheus ascended to the heavens, stole fire from the gods, and descended. Jason sailed through the Clashing rocks into a sea of marvels, circumvented the dragon that guarded the Golden fleece, and returned with the fleece and the power to wrest his rightful throne from a usurper. Aeneas went down into the underworld, crossed the dreadful river of the dead, threw the sop to the three-headed watchdog Cerberus, and conversed, at last, with the shade of his dead father. All things were unfolded to him: the destiny of souls, the destiny of Rome, which he has about to found, ‘and in what wise he might avoid or endure every burden’. He returned through the ivory gate to his work in the world. (Campbell 48)

A hero in this way transcends his personal limitations and enters the regime of a heroic self. The first two phases in the life of a hero are dependent on his personal decision i.e. the decision to go on a journey and the decision to respond to the call of an adventure. The third phase of his life is for people, his fellow men towards whom he returns after getting a number of experiences during his heroic journey. He then becomes the part of a universal spirit of heroism which does not belong to a single man

but to all the heroes of the world. This is the spirit which becomes the inspirational source for all the goodness prevailing or being preserved (even if it is achieved by fighting against the injustice or evil) in this world.

The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one's visions, ideas, inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought. Hence they are eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is reborn. The hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man – perfected unspecific, universal man – he has been reborn. His solemn task and deed therefore (as Tonybee declares and as all the mythologies of mankind indicate) is to return then to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed. (Campbell 43)

Following these ideas of Campbell, when we intensely observe the character of Parsa, his ideas, visions and inspirations seem to be influenced by the ideology of the mythic character Parashurama, the sixth incarnation of God Vishnu. Parashurama belonged to the lineage of Bhrigu *rishi*, who is believed to be the wisest and greatest *rishi* of his time. Parashurama's grandfather was Richeek who married Satayavati, the daughter of a Kashariya king Gadhi. In this way he broke with the rigid traditional classification of the caste system according to which it was mandatory for a Brahmin boy to marry a girl born in another Brahmin family. His father Jamadagni also married Renuka, the daughter of the Kashatriya king, Parsenjit. Both his father and grandfather were also known for their knowledge and wisdom. Consequently, the lineage of Parashurama was a blend of wisdom and rebellious elements. Parashurama, true to the disposition of his lineage, took this tradition to the next elevated level when he fought against the cruel Kashatriya king Karatvira and his sons and wisely got his mother revived after slaying her head. According to Campbell, "hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man... he has been reborn" (43). Parashurama, in this regard, might have been dead as a mythic hero but he has obviously been reborn in the character of Parsa.

The hypothetical constructs for the third and the last area of our interest (i.e. hero as an existential being) have been derived from Jean Paul Sartre's ideas about

subjectivity, freedom, and decision and Camus' ideas about the futility of human existence and the moments of happiness on the face of extreme grimness. Contrary to Campbell's ideas, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus believe that hero has not died as a modern man or neither can he die as long as he is conscious about his existence on this earth. For Sartre, man is what he makes of himself. It is entirely in the hands of a man (which obviously depends on his conscious decisions) whether he dominates the situation or is being victimized by it. It is the matter of being the master of the situation where a man becomes able to objectify others. As long as he is the controller of the situation, he is the hero of his own existence as well as of all others. Sartre calls this central place as the "looking" position from where the master objectifies the position of the other i.e. "looked at" position. A hero, through his never-to-submit attitude, does not leave any space for others to come at the centre. This is possible only when the hero possesses a strong subjectivity. He serves as a "hole" to which all others lose their subjectivities. He, therefore, dominates the situation by virtue of his strong subjective position.

Consciousness plays an important role in creating a "heroic-self." One is unmistakably on the path of heroism when he is conscious about his ordeals and still possesses the attitude – "all is well." When Oedipus becomes conscious of his actual position, "a tremendous remark rings out: 'Despite so many ordeals, my advanced age and the nobility of my soul make me conclude that all is well'. Sophocles' Oedipus [Oedipus], like Dostoevsky's Kirilov, thus, gives the recipe for the absurd victory. Ancient wisdom confirms modern heroism" (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 77). Many men endure sufferings on this earth without being conscious about their actual positions. But a hero endures sufferings consciously. Camus describes this notion with the help of the existential condition of Sisyphus as:

...one sees merely the whole effort of a body straining to raise the huge stone, to roll it and push it up a slope a hundred times over; one sees the face screwed up, the cheek tied against the stone, the shoulder bracing the clay-covered mass, the foot wedging it, the fresh start with arms outstretched, the wholly human security of two earth-clotted hands. At the very end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments

toward that lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back to the plain.

It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already a stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock.... Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his watched condition: it is that he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.... The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. (76-78)

The purpose to include this lengthy quote in our study is that it throws light on certain internal features of a hero's life. It demonstrates that there are some people on this earth who, even during the darkest phases of their lives, consciously make their own ways to move forward. Despite passing through extremely difficult situations, they not only bear the torments bravely and determinedly but also become the source of inspiration for many others. The protagonists of Gurdial Singh's novels are certainly some of those men who, despite being conscious of their ordeals, have the courage to conclude: "all is well." In the following four chapters, each focusing on a particular novel of Gurdial Singh, we would see how the protagonists of these novels share a common cord with the conceptualization of heroism, particularly in the context of legendary heroes of Punjab. We would also discuss their manners through which they handle their problematic circumstances and become able to stand parallel to the category of superior beings i.e. heroes, "a higher way of holding and conducting oneself" (Estes 13).