Social historians, sociologists and political scientists feel drawn towards the dramatic confrontations between the dominant and the dominated. More so, they take keen interest in examining the universal urge of the oppressed people towards liberation. They also seek to analyze the relations between the powerful and the powerless wherein, the identities of the dominated remain submerged in the hegemonic associations between them. In recent years, scholars from various disciplines who study a variety of areas pertaining to identity crisis and question of representation, have shifted their attention from assessing collective social upheavals to studying individual or class ascertain.

In their emerging research, personal quests for identification have therefore become the centre of study. Their consequent substantiations celebrate the indomitable spirit of the marginalized people, which refuses to surrender to any vicious power cycle. Such studies are based on the analysis of class, gender, race and caste prejudices where the powerful always in superior positions are ever-ready to relegate the subordinate groups while the latter are forever restless to break free.

It is also interesting to see how different oppressed sections act and react to the power driven society. Their show of a variety of confrontational behaviours and resistance techniques ranging from outright defiance to subtle non-confirmatory responses to power are also intriguing. Power in any case stands contested and constantly challenged by the subordinate who make desperate attempts to escape domination. Resistance to power in whatever form it may be, as such emerges as an attempt of an individual to assert his / her identity and to establish that he / she stands in opposition to oppression. Such dissatisfied people are also seen to resort to various methods to express their discontentment against their oppressors through different resistance strategies.
James Scott calls these “everyday forms of resistance”, where the struggle of the subordinate people is subtly manifested in their daily behaviours and even cultural practices, unlike the overt manifestations which are only occasional. These “everyday forms of resistance” as explained by Scott presents and studies the contestatory processes as individual episodes of confrontation against the dominant society. Here, even the clever escape from outright denial of authority is a form of resistance and a survival strategy. This marks a departure from the usual tendency to understand resistance as always being a collective, cohesive and conscious effort. Therefore, resistance can also be viewed as an everyday phenomenon and not necessarily as a consequence of extraordinary upheavals in social order. Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash explain in this regard:

Resistance, we would argue, should be defined as those behaviours and cultural practices by subordinate groups that contest hegemonic social formations, that threaten to unravel the strategies of domination; ‘consciousness’ need not be essential to its constitution. (3)

In short, it is therefore the circumstances and the degree of oppression that make certain actions contestatory and decide their magnitude.

In India, the subordinate people include various categories such as – women, peasants, bonded labourers, etcetera. In addition to these caste and class differences also create a marginalized lot. These people have invariably borne the brunt of changes in social scenarios and the fast changing economic conditions. However, in the present study the peasantry of the Malwa region of Punjab will be our focus. These peasants have often resorted to different kinds of methods to either live through oppression or contest it. James C. Scott explains that many peasants resort to peace in difficult situations because of the fear of their employers or lack of courage to revolt. He attributes this to the understanding and remembrance of the class caste-divide, so very inherent in the Indian culture, and calls this as “peace of repression”. This he explains is not the peace of consent or
compliance but a peace of age old suppression that is deep seated in their racial consciousness regarding societal norms. Also, the fear of non-conformance to these and the resultant disharmony and ostracization also prevents them from standing up against authority.

Thus, contesting authority openly may not be resorted to by many. Nevertheless, certain notable defiant behaviours suggestive of the uneasiness of the downtrodden are easily observable in every-day life. The silenced people who seem to accept slavery and inequality as a way of life register their disapproval through their token withdrawal from society which in itself speaks volumes about their abhorrence of the same. Their quiet and deliberate evasion from dominant society works more effectively for them than open defiance which often leads to drastic outcomes.

Many-a times for them, abstinence from active involvement in society proves to be more fruitful than assertion as observed by James C. Scott. In this regard Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash quote Michael Adas who writes, “Dissatisfied groups seek to attenuate their hardships and express their discontent through flight, sectarian withdrawal, or other activities that minimize challenges to or clashes with those whom they view as their oppressors” (9).

As far as the impact of these everyday forms of resistance is concerned, these may not be covered in the headlines but they do achieve their goal. Another reason of not being able to hit the news is that the reporters, chroniclers and historians who are responsible for bringing contestatory incidents to become news may themselves not belong to the resisting class and so are not interested or well-equipped to report what is desirable and authentic. Literature here plays an important role because the writer is far more closer to the masses and to reality. The writer's investigations into the ground realities give an outlet to the anger and violence of the inflicted people through the use of word.
In his novel *The Survivors*, Gurdial Singh voices the concerns of such socially afflicted individuals through the persona of a self-respecting person Bishna who believes in maintaining his own dignity and respecting the individuality of others. He is a revolutionary as far as his awareness of his personal honour is concerned. Through Bishna, the writer deals with the question of dignity of many powerless self-respecting people. In his essay, “The Survivors: Eternal search for Human Existence”, Dr. Manjinder Singh writes:

Gurdial Singh concentrates in his novel *The Survivors* on the primary questions like free thinking, the contradictions between an individual and society through the self-respected Bishna, he calls for freedom from cultural subjugation. This novel is a saga of a person who has free thinking. (Tarsem and Sushil 64)

*The Survivors* is Gurdial Singh’s second novel after *The Last Flicker*. It poses grave social problems in narrative form. The novel depicts the problems of adjustment to the rapidly changing social conditions of a village where smaller markets are fast changing into bigger ones due to the changes in economy. Here, the newly established consumerist culture threatens to do away with the old values of love and respect. This altered value system shatters the lives of many like Bishna who believe in the older system of values and who are not ready to sway with the changing times.

In this regard Dr. S.P. Singh observes, “So, the novel deals with the problems of village life in changing context. People are not mentally prepared to face such problems. Some people dare to fight for their rights. But they are limited to themselves only” (Tarsem & Sushil 62). He continues to write that Bishna is one of those many who feel strongly about the injustice done to them. He understands how one feels when he is discriminated against. He is also aware of the exploitation of the poor and he dares to openly challenge the state. In his concern for the downtrodden he stands representative of the entire oppressed class.
In this novel, Gurdial Singh talks of the swiftly developing market culture that grows powerful by the day because of the money involved. Bishna and his lot feel out of place in such times of turmoil due to their old set of values that do not allow them to stoop to economic concerns. Bishna does try hard to keep pace with the changing times and reluctantly engrosses himself in meeting the increasing demands of work and minutes but never does he approve of the ethics involved. The ever-increasing demands of this complex modern life make things even more difficult for him. Thus Bishna, a revolutionary and a free man in spirit, is forced to do many things contrary to his will. Dr. Manjinder Singh explains his plight as, “In capitalist society a man is not regarded as a living entity rather he has to accept the role of a cog in the machine” (Tarsem & Sushil 63).

Unhoye or The Survivors relates the brave tale of Bishna who deals with the multiple problems of the marketization of village life with a touch of rare personal courage. As the twin forces of urbanization and modernization loom in a threatening manner, Bishna dares to stand in their way alone and unguarded. He obstinately challenges the state and its authority in an attempt to maintain his own dignity. Establishing his conquest as representative of many such rebels Rana Nayar the translator of Unhoye writes:

Bishna’s fate is vaguely reminiscent of the undocumented, unsung lives of countless millions who perished in the hope of a better future, who suffered dispossession and displacement in modern India on account of construction of roads, dams and vast, overgrown urban jungles. (Tarsem & Sushil 54)

The callous market forces and the ruthless urbanization not only ruin individual rights but also leave a person isolated because of the changed social relations. Due to monetary interest, personal relationships stand shattered and ignored. This is evident in the behaviour of Bishna’s brother Bhagta, who has capitalist interests and who is more than willing to betray and desert Bishna for the
sake of money. Whereas, Bishna remains an upright man throughout life, Bhagta finds it hard to resist the temptation and compromises his loyalty to his brother. Through the spoiled relations between Bishna and his younger brother Bhagta, Gurdial Singh successfully captures the deterioration in human values with the surge of modernization. Dr. S.P. Singh summarizes this conflict as, “In the consumerist culture, small markets turning into big ones symbolize the increasing domination of capitalists values over the socialist values” (Tarsem and Sushil 62).

More than the atrocities of the state, Bishna stands totally aghast at the unscrupulous behaviour of his own brother Bhagta whom he and his wife have brought up like their own child. The two find it difficult to come to terms at being disowned by someone who has been so close to them. This collapse in the social order is also evident through the altered behaviour of Lala Gokul Chand, Bishna’s employer, who abandons Bishna as soon as he is faced with a choice between him and money. Summing up this grave situation Rana Nayar writes, “Nowhere is the human face of destruction so alarmingly visible as in the slow collapse of the kinship culture, a breakdown of a whole network of personal / social relations under the corrosive influence of modernization” (Tarsem and Sushil 54).

The ugly face of modernity is shown by Gurdial Singh through the ordeals faced by Bishna in an attempt to save his house and his honour. His quest for survival in his humble attempt to maintain his rights by demanding justice is denied to him and this infuriates him. Sadly, his angry manifestations lead him towards tragedy and he stands totally ruined. He never hopes for a revolution but stands destroyed even in the hope of self-preservation. Nevertheless, Bishna lives and dies with dignity and that is all what matters to him. But, his quest for self-respect makes him an, obdurate diffident in the eyes of society and he becomes a target of the inconsiderate social set-up. However, his undefeated soul and fearless personality remains exemplary for many others who dare to challenge authority and refuse to accept injustice and unjust treatment.
The novel begins with a capturing start where the arrest of Bishna, his wife Daya Kaur and his brother Bhagta is portrayed dramatically. Gurdial Singh begins the novel by introducing the reader to Bishna's house, a dilapidated fortress, which is the centre of conflict between Bishna and the state. The reader is also acquainted with the tension that pervades the forceful arrest of the three with the entry of the police. The house reverberates with roaring battle cries of the three such as "Jo Bole So Nihal..." and "Sat Sri Akal..." (17).

Engaging in this show of rare personal assertion, the crowd keeps shifting their positions to take a better view of things. Here, the mob mentality which thrives on the pleasure out of other's misery has been realistically described by Gurdial Singh. The entire episode portrays the vanity of the state and its system in arresting Bishna, Bhagta and Daya Kaur who are desperate to save their house from being dismantled. But, in this obviously unequal claim for ownership, the state wins and the three are left hollering out hollow battle cries—the only means of maintaining their dignity and honour.

Gurdial Singh describes the helplessness, humiliation and agitation that Bishna feels as he addresses the crowd, "Look! O you people of the town! The government has arrested the dacoits and is now dragging the damned criminals away!" (18). The three proclaimed offenders burn with rage as they step out of their house. Daya Kaur particularly becomes the centre of gaze because she presses ahead "unabashedly, so like a man" (19) something unaccepted to society. This episode ends with the slow dispersal of the onlookers from the scene.

Through this extremely scintillating start Gurdial Singh manages to arrest the interest of the readers with the description of the arrest of Bishna, Bhagta and Daya Kaur. At the very outset, it become evident to the reader that the story offers action packed drama and appears to be eventful with increasing suspense over why the three are being taken away by the police. The reader therefore feels compelled to continue with the text.
As the story proceeds the hustle and bustle continues and we come to know that the preparations are on for the arrival of the Chief Minister of Nabha, a princely Sikh State. The officials and the subordinates are busy arranging the pandal amidst much commotion all around. Bishna and his family who are now out on bail, can also be seen working assiduously putting away their belongings in the dilapidated compound next to their house which was earlier occupied by the Seths about fifteen years ago. Presently, the compound and the Kothri stand in ruins and Bishna with the help of an accomplice Budha along with Daya Kaur try their best to make the place liveable.

Soon, the captivating arrangements for the Vazir’s durbar attracts the attention of the reader. The long description of the Vazir himself and his official’s grandeur offer a stark contrast to Bishna’s sorry plight “who is standing outside the tent, with the sun beating down upon his head” (21). As he stands there almost neglected and ignored, Bishna smirks at the three well-fed Chaudharies’s who sit with pretended pride while Bishna silently recollects their shady past. He travels down the memory lane, and first inspects Gokul Chand now seated with pomp in his rich clothes over his swollen flesh. Bishna recalls how Gokul’s father went around hawking utensils loaded on a lame pony. He also remembers his own mother buying utensils from him ones which he still uses.

Turning his attention to Seth Shiv Ram on Gokul’s left side, who now sits high above the rest in a Marwari turban and gilt spectacles. Actually, he hails from a humble family of a small shop-keeper as Bishna remembers. Bishna also recalls how Shiv Ram’s mother was an extremely garrulous woman and Bishna and his friends mischievously called her a “hooked” lady because of a small hook like ornament that she wore. She kept the company of unscrupulous Jats while her young son Chibbu took care of the shop. However, as for now this Chibbu, as Bishna becomes painfully aware, has metamorphosed into Seth Shiv Ram Chaudhary after they migrated from the village to set up a shop in Mandi.
Bishna next inspects the gait of Choudhary Thamman Mal. Gurdial Singh elucidates Bishna’s feelings for him as, “Bishna felt nausea gorge his throat when he remembered bits of his past” (23). Bishna feels disturbed to see him pose as a respectable person even after poisoning his own father and uncle for property as he was their only heir. Bishna vividly remembers how after doing away with them, Thamman first transferred the entire property in his name, sold it and moved to Mandi to set up a cotton-carding factory. Gradually he became rich and now he sits as one of the influential ones. Bishna feels uneasy when he remembers how Thamman had ill-treated his aunt and her daughters too. His aunt was left to die a dog’s death and the daughters were disposed off to paupers.

With shock and deep felt hatred for these newly turned respectables, Bishna calls out to them spurting out “Chaudhary” oblivious of where he stands. Once again, Bishna views the entire arrangements and the nervous organizers cannot help laughing. Bishna’s justifiable dislike for such dubiously turned rich shows his agony over the desperate lives of many like him who prefer righteousness over monetary concerns. He is baffled over the society’s preference of wealth over moral scruples. He feels uneasy on observing how money has bought respectability for the Chaudharies. Here, the hegemonic relations between the fortunates and the have-nots based only on money particularly pains Bishna. He feels cheated and wronged against on seeing the wrong-doers flourish and sit at judgment on upright ones like him who are inferior only because they are poor and powerless.

Soon, the proceedings for the day begin with the briefing by the Vazir. After, an old woman who has come as a petitioner, Bishna steps forward with unbeatable self-respect to plea his case as he looks “straight into the (Vazir’s) eyes with eagle eyes” (25). Bishna’s non-stooping back and his reluctant hand folding does not go unnoticed and the (Vazir) uneasily enquires about Bishna. By this time Bishna is ready with his petition and he begins with undaunted courage and obstinate abruptness addressing the (Vazir) as, “Is there justice in your reign?”(25). This obviouslyannoys the (Vazir) greatly. Bishna continues to demand justice as
he further quietens the official who interrupts him threateningly. Bishna retorts to his advances and says, “Is this what you say when someone demands justice or complains of injustice? It seems, only he is wise who loses the shirt off his back without a word or stays silent even when his house is being burgled…” (26).

The official therefore is unable to curb Bishna’s sarcasm as he demands his duly registered house back. He even points at the registering official putting him in a tight position and leaving him gritting his teeth. The official quickly briefs the (Vazir) while the public waits eagerly not for justice but for further drama to happen. They even talk about Bishna’s brave resistance the day he was arrested.

However, as Bishna apprehends, the matter is asked to be addressed in the form of a written complaint in the court of law. To this Bishna immediately objects saying that he has been denied justice in the court and now he stands for the same reason before the Vazir. This puts the Vazir in an awkward position and Bishna continues his tale of illegal dispossession and about the forceful snatching away of his legally registered house followed by his family’s unlawful arrest.

Bishna’s authoritative and commanding rejection of the (Vazir’s) offer to compensate for his house elsewhere irritates the latter greatly. The (Vazir) finds it hard to suppress his hatred and dislike for Bishna as he dismisses his plea for now and asks him to go to court. But as Bishna persists in his demands for justice, he inadvertently becomes a target of all those in position there. Failing to put his case through, Bishna taunts at the unjust treatment saying, “This big court has already overwhelmed me with its justice, and now it’s the turn of your small court” (28).

Finally, its Bishna’s blatant courage and undaunted spirit that surprises everyone present in the pandal. He declares, “All right! If there’s justice on this earth, I’ll claim it with all my might. Never again shall I come cringing before you. And I shall bear the brunt of all that befalls me upon this very chest” (28). He leaves in an invincible manner and all eyes marvel at his bluntness as he walks out.
of the pandal. However, Bishna himself feels terribly uneasy to see another petitioner after him bowing his head before the (Vazir).

This powerful episode where Bishna pleads his case regarding undue harassment and illegal confiscation of property, land and house in front of the (Vazir) brings to light the intricate social fabric woven with threads of inequality and injustice. These pervade the entire society where innumerable sufferers like Bishna live unprivileged lives and die deprived deaths. Through the mockery of meeting out of justice, the writer successfully lays bare the reality of the entire act. Gurdial Singh shows how it is actually injustice that is perpetuated through such durbars. The writer hits hard on the influential and mighty lot of society who in the name of granting justice, strengthen unjust ways.

Through Bishna’s helplessness at the hands of the state, the court and its officials who actually exploit people, Gurdial Singh lashes out on the fake judiciary and its blind goddess of justice. Here, Bishna’s sarcasm towards the lopsided judicial system is actually the writer’s own contempt against the mock-drill of granting justice. In addition to this, Gurdial Singh also touches upon the sorry state of the innocent petitioners who are beguiled by the lofty promises of the system. Bishna, therefore, feels totally disillusioned with the state and its ways in granting relief. He also feels sorry for others like him who have still not understood the mockery.

Bishna’s disgust towards the officials especially towards the Choudharys who use money and power to hide their shady pasts even after committing heinous crimes, is any common man’s abhorrence of all those who conceal their spotted history with the purchased garb of refinement and pretentious honour. He does not hesitate in openly revealing his dislike for such oppressors. Bishna’s indomitable spirit and incomparable courage therefore make him stand out among the other deprived people like him who fail to rise to such heights. Bishna also deserves our
admiration because he does not compromise. His battle is the battle of every small man against the colossal state in which the defeat of the former is inevitable.

In this novel, the hollowness and the shallowness of the societal agencies is exposed through the inevitable doom proclaimed by them for many like Bishna.

Assessing the situation Rana Nayar writes in his "Introduction" to this novel that:

Apparently, if the mindset remains essentially feudal, all visible efforts at modernizing the society would only be self destructive. The real revolution belongs to the mind, where social attitude and/or relationships need to be periodically reassessed, and also reinvented, if necessary. (no pag.)

Rana Nayar also explains how the centre margin relationship works in the novel. He explain that Bishna’s choice of living at the outskirts of the town, …“confirms his status as a proverbial outsider, an outcast in a state of willful self-retrait, but also underscores his outright rejection of the hierarchy-driven, caste-ridden, status-conscious moffusil society” (no pag.). In contrast to the privileged people living at the centre of the township, this house of Bishna on the periphery of the town is a reminder of the relegation of all the under-privileged ones. However, inspite of this subjection to discrimination, Bishna’s instinct to survive and contest society is phenomenal.

As a continuation of his blatant defiance of societal atrocities, the next morning after Bishna refused to be dominated at the Vazir’s durbar, he goes to reclaim his tools and implements kept at Gokul’s Haveli after being confiscated. As soon as, Bishna reaches the haveli, the very sight of Gokul’s flabby calves and bulging legs make Bishna’s hatred for him even more sharper. With some clever retorts, Bishna makes his dislike for Gokul very evident. Giving Gokul his piece of
mind, Bishna sarcastically remarks when the latter talks about the role of God’s blessings as, “But Choudhary, when human beings are at their worst, even god is wary. You know how innocent a calf is, but when out of control, it is worse than a raging bull” (30). Sensing what Bishna is hinting at, Gokul laughs sheepishly but he does not dare to look into Bishna’s eyes.

Later when Bishna asks for his tools that Gokul has been in official possession of, Gokul pretends to know nothing about them. This enrages Bishna all the more and voicing out his hatred for the dubiously turned rich, Bishna says, “Here I stand on the ground, and there you’re perched upon a pucca platform in front of your three storied palace. How will you make sense of what I say?” (30). This speech of Bishna highlights the class divide between the rich and the poor, the very cause of all miseries of all the powerless and have-nots.

After many lame excuses Gokul does hand over some implements to Bishna fearing his temper that he had already seen the previous day at the durbar. As for Bishna, this small triumph of a petty man caught in a battle with the mighty and the influential is quite satisfactory.

The story moves forward with Bishna, Daya Kaur and Budha trying to smoothen things. The three work hard to repair the dilapidated house and make it liveable. While they are busy making the necessary arrangements the gossip-mongers are busy cooking up stories and recount the outright defiance of Bishna and Daya Kaur. Unaware of what the people think, Bishna feels great relief in his new home. Bishna and Daya Kaur lived here earlier in better times when work was in plenty and Bishna as an artisan was in demand. Now, reconciling with change as a law of nature, Bishna rests his nostalgia by telling Budha, “Let the old days be. Whatever happens, happens for the best” (15).

Further in the story, we are introduced to Hetiya to whose house Bishna pays a visit. Hetiya, the muneem, lives a life of want and Bishna inspects his house which is in a great mess. Bishna’s attention is soon captured by a large pot or a
leather encased oil canister that hangs just below the ceiling. On enquiring, Hetiya tells Bishna that it contains a medicinal herb calling it *Sanjivni*. Intrigued with what Hetiya tells Bishna about the herb and its formula given to him by Lord Krishna himself, he listens with interest to Hetiya who recounts all the facts with great care asking Bishna not to let them out to anybody else. Hetiya tells Bishna that according to the formula for this chemical, he has already added some fifty one herbs and he needs another one hundred one to get the desired product.

Hetiya’s obsession with the *Sanjivni* that he claims to make one day reminds Bishna of similar eccentric behaviour of Hetiya’s father who kept a small stone dipped in cow’s urine for about five years. He changed the urine every third day. Then for three years he kept several herbs and medicinal plants soaked in this urine and dung buried into the ground. For the next three months and a year, he buried all the things near the roots of a *peepal* tree and then for the same time buried them right in the middle of a crossroad. Bishna also remembers how Hetiya’s father too shared his secrets with him in a hushed, conspirational tone telling him his heart-kept secret of buying the havelis owned by the Mandi Seths with the ‘touchstone’ that he claimed to make.

Bishna also recalls how Hetiya’s father had managed to work his way up to become a muneem from a petty labourer. He and Hetiya had worked really hard and each time a testing circumstances hit them, they managed to *survive*. Bishna also recalls how Hetiya enjoyed some days of domestic life with a nomad woman whom he had bought. But she soon died and the father and son were again left alone to give each other company.

Bishna witnesses the same eccentricity in Hetiya’s eyes but tries hard not to laugh at him openly. But when Hetiya tells Bishna that fate will surely rain on him too one day, Bishna is unable to contain his laughter. This hurts Hetiya and his face falls. This episode ends with Hetiya’s concern about Bishna’s future as the latter leaves Hetiya’s house telling him that he too would start making a chemical if nothing works for him. Bishna departs leaving a sullen Hetiya behind.
This episode about Hetiya and his father’s eccentricities may not further the story in any way but it does serve a purpose in the story. Their tale of survival in misery and their courage to live in the worst of times, speaks of the central thematic concern of this novel-SURVIVAL. The humble journey of rising to the Muneem status speaks about their ‘will’ to make life better. Even in their abnormal behaviour about making a touch-stone or the Sanjivni, it is their spirit of not giving up without trying that is noteworthy. Though the reader is as aware as Bishna that they may never succeed in their desperate attempts to find a panacea for all their problems, even then their non-indulgence in self-pity and non-submission to helpless resignation makes them respectable in our eyes. The two at least try to make things better even when they hope for miracles to happen which is one of the wishful survival strategies of the have-nots. Through them the writer introduces the reader to a different category of ‘Survivors’.

From here onwards the complications in the story are introduced in the form of Bhagta’s wife Kartari who is an outspoken and a rude woman. She is particularly annoyed with her husband’s kind treatment of her elder brother-in-law Bishna and his wife Daya Kaur. Bent upon ruining the family’s harmony, Kartari does not even spare her husband and keeps on scolding him all day long. Maghi, her son, tells Bishna and Daya Kaur about Kartari’s harsh behaviour towards his ailing father who keeps on crying in pain all day long. Bishna feels agitated on listening about Bhagta’s illness.

However, he feels hesitant to go and meet Bhagta, because the latter is already annoyed with him for not complying with the government’s orders to vacate the house on the outskirts. This disagreement has turned their relationship sour. Whereas Bhagta thinks that Bishna is unnecessarily adding to the complications and problems, he has never had the heart to tell Bishna openly about how he feels, because the latter and his wife, have cared for him like father and mother after the death of his own mother, when he was barely five years old. After losing six children of their own, Bishna and Daya Kaur look upon Bhagta as their own son.
At this juncture, Bishna is shown recalling their double storied house in Mandi, built by the hard-earned life’s savings of their father. He also recalls how the house bustled with happiness in the past. He remembers how the two brothers worked hard to become successful. They had even bought a two knal plot on the outskirts close to the main road and had constructed another house. However, as destiny turned, their father Harnama died and the garrulous Kartari entered the family. Their timber business also suffered a great loss and the two brothers were again forced to live ordinary lives. Nevertheless, Bishna never lost heart and never gave up and he always wanted Bhagta to be spared of all the misfortune and hard times.

Engulfed in the thoughts about the past, Bishna reaches Bhagta’s house to enquire about his health. On seeing Bhagta’s worn out and apparently aged face Bishna feels extremely agitated. Gurdial Singh gives a heart-touching account of Bishna’s ruffled inner-self as he writes: “For a moment, Bishna kept staring at him quietly and then lowered his gaze, he felt a sudden stab in his chest that shot through his eyes searing them as though a sliver of stone had pierced through”(46). Regardless of the unexpressed but visible pain that Bishna is going through, Kartari hits him with her sarcastic remarks. Even as Bhagta tries to silence her, she continues to pour out venom. Bishna quietly leaves the house “like a blind man”(47).

Through the hardships faced by Bishna and his family, the writer once again celebrates the survival instincts of fighters. The tale of the rising of the family from a life of deprivation to a life of success and then falling back again to a life of want relates their journey of success and downfall. However, Bishna’s unfailing courage in the face of all odds and his refusal to submit to the testing times in both rise and fall is the very essence of this story. Even as he is forced to live a humble life once again, Bishna readily accepts the change and does not lose heart. Unlike his weakling brother Bhagta who lies ailing in bed more with the shame of being arrested and subsequently falling sick, Bishna faces life boldly and settles down once again in a totally ruined house on the outskirts.
Bishna’s indomitable courage shines in stark contrast to the helplessness of Bhagta whose courage seems to have failed him. He is unable to bear the humiliation of being arrested even though for right reasons. He holds Bishna responsible for his present state. He is unable to face the people and the establishment anymore. Kartari tells Bishna, “Now, you’d better leave him alone! ... If you want him to live, just let him be. Right now, he’s just a skeleton, but if, you decide to get him arrested once again, ther’d be nothing left of him...”(47).

Through this episode the writer reflects upon the deterioration in human affiliations and familial bonds. Bhagta, who is just like a son to Bishna, and who enjoys a better house and life than Bishna, refuses to side with the latter even when the fight is for their collective rights and property. Rana Nayar talks about this degradation when he writes in his “Introduction” to the Survivors: “Now here is the “human face of destruction ... so alarmingly visible as in the slow collapse of the kinship culture, a breakdown of a whole network of personal and social relations under the corrosive influence of modernization” (no pag.). It is more than evident in Bhagta who is in no mood to second his brother any further. Here the writer exposes the downfall of family culture and talks of the barrenness in relationships. He also talks about the negative power of the state that breaks down ordinary folks like Bhagta who readily agree to abandon their own under its overpowering influence.

This negative influence is also manifested in the further developments of the story. After visiting Bhagta and suffering insults at the hands of Kartari, Bishna returns home disturbed. He asks Budha to go and visit Bhagta to enquire if he wants to set up a separate business. Budha seems to be taken aback because since he was employed as their worker 20 years ago, never had he imagined that the two brothers would separate. Budha who has forever been loyal to the family, consider himself a part of their family and can not imagine life without them. This is the reason that Budha is hurt by the idea of separation even though he is aware that separation is inevitable now.
Reluctantly, Budha goes over to Bhagta's house where he finds Bhagta in a bad shape. No sooner do they start talking that Kartari enters and taunts Budha at his sad disposition and deep sighs. To this Budha retorts, saying, "When the tide turns against you, what else can you do but sigh" (50). Kartari continues her sarcastic talk while Bhagta remains silent with downcast eyes. Even before Buddha could mention the purpose of his visit, Kartari asks him to go and tell Bishna to give them their share of implements. Budha now becomes fully aware of the sour relations between their families. He tries to convince Kartari to rethink over the division but she pours out her contempt for Bishna and his wife saying:

I've thought over it, I've had enough. There's no way we can ever get along with them. You ask me, why? They are going to do all the wrong things for which we'll have to suffer. Morning and evening, this belly demands food. Children have their own needs. If we follow them, we'll get nothing but suffering in the bargain... (51)

Deeply agonized by Kartari's shameless outburst, both Bhagta and Budha are stunned to listen to her. After she leaves, Budha expresses his loyalty saying, "Bhai, it really breaks my heart each time I think of it! ... All my life, I've lived off your salt. So, it really hurts me to see the house being split into two ..." (52). He begins to cry while saying this and tells Bhagta that he has come to his house for the same reason. After Budha departs, Bhagta looks totally distraught and guilty because he has already brought some tools and logs from Gokul Choudhary's house without telling Bishna, and this is now gnawing at him. While Bhagta suffers in silent agony, Kartari derives a certain sadistic pleasure seeing him roll in pain—both emotional and mental.

In this emotion packed episode, the writer brings out Bhagta's guilt conscious through his odd behaviour which also marks the writer's deep understanding of his psychological state. In addition to Bhagta's sorry plight, of
Kartari’s venomous attitude towards Bishna and Bhagta is pictured by the writer in the last lines of this episode when Bhagta sits uneasily after realizing his own callousness Gurdial Singh writes:

A strange look appeared on his wan face, which made him look rather ill, even dangerous. But when Kartari saw Bhagta sitting in this manner, she felt strangely gratified, even happy. And while he sat there, she kept moving in and out, looking furtively towards him. (53)

Gurdial Singh’s indepth analysis of the psychological tensions that Bishna, Bhagta and Budha are going through, shows how the three suffer individually though the cause is common. Whereas the noble Bishna is troubled more about Bhagta’s happiness, Bhagta suffers because he has cheated on Bishna. Budha who is not related to them in blood, suffers unavoidable pain because of his loyalty to the house where he has lived comfortably and honourably for twenty years after being shunned as a failure by others in society.

Through this event in the story, the writer adds intricate complications to the plot of the novel. The separation of the two brothers has both literal and ironic implications. Whereas the separation will lead to the physical estrangement between the two brothers, it also hints at the distancing of Bhagta and Kartari from Bishna’s battle against injustice, thus leaving him alone in his fight against oppression. In this chapter, the writer once again voices his concern over the diluting relationships and the victory of personal comfort over joint responsibilities. Gurdial Singh also contrasts the thanklessness and ingratitude of Bhagta to the loyalty and sincerity of Budha who feels deep concern over the separation. Bhagta seems to have forgotten all the sacrifices of his brother and his wife and is ready to desert them in such troubled times. Through Bhagta, Gurdial Singh lays bare the selfishness of convenient social bondings where individual prosperity and personal well-being weighs heavily on even blood relations.
In the further developments of the story, Bishna looks crestfallen when Budha carts off most of the tools to Bhagta’s house. Seeing him in such a condition, Daya Kaur becomes extremely agitated. After engaging Bishna in a conversation, she tells him that the Seths from Phool town want them to vacate their compound, a news that she got from Santi Brahmani whose husband Beli Ram had come to know about it in Phool town.

On hearing this, Bishna readily prepares himself for the worse saying, “After all, it’s men who must suffer. How does it matter?” (55). Accepting the impending challenges with stoicism, Bishna recalls how this compound was given to his father on a rent of two rupees a month by Telu Mai and how Bishna had raised the rent to eight rupees a month by choice. He therefore fails to understand why Telu Mai wants the compound back. He does put up a brave appearance in front of Daya Kaur, but he is unable to contain his inner turmoil.

To make matters worse, Budha now comes with the news of their house on the outskirts being pulled down. Daya Kaur is quick to judge that it could only be Gokul’s mischief while Bishna strangely maintains his calm on hearing this news. But as soon as Daya Kaur goes off to sleep, he moves outdoors and hurriedly reaches the rubble of his confiscated house. The sight of his demolished house shatters him and he returns home after a long while with a heavy heart. The ruins of his home where he had spent some very memorable moments ruin him within.

The next morning, the news of the rubble of the confiscated house being set on fire is brought by Hetiya who looks grief-stricken as he breaks the news to an indifferent Bishna who says: “But Het Rama, if it has already caught fire, then it was god’s will. Are we able to stop a man from dying?” (61).

This seemingly calm talk by Bishna agitates Hetiya furthermore and he tries to put some sense into Bishna saying:
If you had been wise enough to carry the rubble he, wouldn’t it have been of some use? People are ready to murder for money and you don’t even bother about thousands! When will you start behaving like a man who has to struggle to keep his body and soul together? (61)

This straight talk by Hetiya infuriates Bishna who controls himself with great difficulty. But a concerned Hetiya continues to scold Bishna and even when Bishna asks him to shut up he says: “A man values money only when he doesn’t have it...no property, no clothes, no food ... .People like you don’t know how to value all this. If you had a large family, you’d have known ...” (61).

However as for now, Bishna has other things on his mind. He asks Budha to join Bhagta saying, “All I want is that Bhagta’s work should get going” (63). Budha obeys his command and leaves Bishna’s house as if it was his permanent departure from there. He goes away crying.

As desired by Bishna, his plan works as Budha and Bhagta start working seriously. Bhagta, who had never shouldered any responsibility because of Bishna’s patriarchy, summons up his courage and his wits and the two soon take command of things and do well. As for Bishna, he feels lonely and drained out of strength after Budha joins Bhagta. However, a survivor that he is, Bishna soon adjusts to working alone for which he has to make special implements. Left alone in the house, Daya Kaur and Bishna start life afresh.

When Daya Kaur props up the question of going back to their demolished house and enquires what the government would do if they did so, Bishna does not answer her. After a while he is seen saying to himself, “In this world, might is right...Being civilized simply doesn’t work. It’s only when you grab them by their necks that they start walking straight” (70).
Daya Kaur doesn’t quite understand the meaning of what he implies but she
does notice his changed countenance and blood-shot eyes. After some days, Budha
comes visiting them and the three enjoy some happy moments together and have
dinner. After asking permission to take two slippers for the cart wheels the
following morning, Budha leaves.

These three closely interconnected episodes in the story point towards the
selfless and sacrificing personality of Bishna. He stands much above the indecisive
and timid Bhagta because he wants to see the latter flourish. Even when he has
been deserted by Bhagta in the most desperate times, never does Bishna complain
or sulk. The writer commands our respect for Bishna by portraying him as a saint
like figure where he sacrifices his personal comfort and his self-interest for the
sake of his thankless brother Bhagta. Here, Daya Kaur’s humble acceptance of her
husband’s decision also demands our praise because if she would have objected,
matters would have been difficult for Bishna to handle. Unlike Kartari, Daya Kaur
believes in maintaining harmony in relationships and the latter’s kindness, even
towards Budha does not go unnoticed. Both Bishna and Daya Kaur become
respectable characters in the eyes of the readers through Gurdial Singh’s art of
characterization.

However, the sad part of their destinies is that their nobility does not
impress a callous society. The fact remains that in this unjust world, the noble
continue to suffer at the hands of the ignoble. In the case of Bishna, he first
receives the summons served by Toti Mal who himself comes a litter later to
reclaim his piece of land given to Bishna. Toti Mal’s changed appearance tells
Bishna that he too has changed and that he was not the same Toti he knew twenty
years ago.

Bishna naturally feels uneasy at Toti Mal’s arrival and his face and eyes
change colour. He and Daya Kaur are soon confronted by Toti who offers them the
rigid choice between increasing the rent or vacating his compound. However,
sensing their anger and their dislike for his proposal, Toti Mal stands confused. Bishna tells him firmly that he would pay the rent but not vacate the land. Daya Kaur also lashes out on Toti Mal vocally as well with an uncut shaft, threatening him not to trouble them further. Toti goes away leaving the enraged couple behind who resume work oblivious of the muffled commotion outside.

This episode marks the worsening of times for Bishna and Daya Kaur. However, here too the couple’s indomitable courage in the face additional disaster impresses the reader. The two stand against the injustice of Toti Mal who had initially begged and even forced Bishna’s family to take charge and care of his land but now he wants it back after they have cared for it for some twenty years. The two feel that it is unjust on the part of Toti to claim this land. However, they both fail to realize the legality of the matter. They also find it hard to reconcile to the idea of parting with this land which they have tended for as their own and for which they have paid a regular rent. It pains the reader to see them fight unequal battles at all times. Bishna’s plight brings out the trauma of such people who live according to moral codes and ultimately lose at all legal fronts. Nevertheless, their non confirmative attitude and their unstooping courage against injustice do demand the reader’s reverence.

As far as the noble Bishna is concerned, he continues to shower his love on Bhagta’s family especially on his children. He loves them irrespective of the inconvenience caused to him due to Bhagta’s estrangement. Bhagta’s children Kala and Maghi also wait eagerly for Bishna’s arrival in the street and playfully search his pockets for hidden goodies.

As time passes, this attachment also weakens. Lately, Bishna has neither seen Bhagta nor his sons for many days. Bishna continues to visit their house from a distance and feels disturbed to find the door shut each time he reaches there. Unable to deliver his love in the form sweets and other things, he stocks them away everyday in a basket without Daya Kaur’s knowledge even though she enquires about Kala and Maghi regularly.
As for Bishna, he is quite relieved and content to know from Budha about the flourishing business of Bhagta. Capturing the mixed feelings of the noble Bishna Gurdial Singh writes:

Only once in a while, Bishna was beaten by a sudden impulse, and wished that Budha, Bhagta and he could work together again, just as they did in the past. But the very next moment, he realized how absurd the idea was. Bhagta and he had parted ways, but all he wanted was to catch an occasional glimpse of his younger brother, and bless him. (78)

Misunderstanding Bishna completely, neither Bhagta nor society ever probes beyond his harsh exterior to see how gentle and kind he is within. Where Bhagta enjoys life oblivious and ignorant of the hardships that Bishna faces, the latter lives a life, of scrutiny and contempt and he suffers continuously at the hands of society. Wherever he goes, people are terrified of his temper and show feigned respect for him, of which Bishna is more than aware. This fakeness irritates him all the more for he knows quite well how everybody despises him and he feels repulsed by their pretended sympathy and false concern. Shattered by the society's hypocrisy and Bhagta's indifference, a sense of dejection accompanied by a feeling of loneliness eats him up from within. His only respite is Daya Kaur. Whenever he is overcome with such feelings, he finds solace in her companionship. Describing their relationship Gurdial Singh writes:

But each time he felt so, he remembered Daya Kaur- her medium height, supple body, white round face and a pair of penetrating eyes, just like his own. He had spend more than thirty years of his life with her and all through these years, she stood by him like a man, shoulder to shoulder, through every crisis of life. At once, Bishna would feel as energized as ever and break into a shabad like an enraptured ragi... (78)
However, Bishna also feels concerned about how she would manage the house if a verdict is pronounced against him. Keeping this in mind, Bishna strives hard to make a cart hiring which, she would earn some money in his absence. As he desires, two days before the hearing in the court, a labourer Kania hires the miraculously light cart made by Bishna at seven rupees a month with two months of rent as advance. Bishna now feels relieved as he has made the necessary arrangements for Daya Kaur for the harsh times to come.

In this episode various shades of Bishna’s character are vividly painted and portrayed by Gurdial Singh. The writer portrays the unconditional love and sacrifice while delineating Bishna’s paternal feelings towards Bhagta, Kala and Maghi. In revealing Bishna’s hatred and contempt for his so called ‘sympathizers and well-wishers’, the writer expresses Bishna’s dislike for them through darker shades of contempt. Further, his loneliness and longing to live as a family with Bhagta is portrayed by Gurdial Singh using more somber shades of noble feelings. Then, Bishna’s feeling of solace in Daya Kaur’s company is revealed by the writer in softer, purer colours of peace and harmony.

His concern and respect for Daya Kaur are described by Gurdial Singh through shades of wisdom and far-sightedness about the inevitable disaster that soon befalls the two. Lastly, the writer reveals the hidden love and suppressed parental feelings of Bishna through the playful and colourful showers of love on Kania’s children. His secret desire for a family is subtly manifest by the writer through Bishna’s unexpressed liking for Kania’s family and his abrupt departures from his house.

The sensitive reader is quick to capture this pain in Bishna’s life. They sense his lacks and wants not in material terms of lack of a complete family. The hard exterior dissolves as the painful hidden inner-self reveals itself to the reader through the subtle art of Gurdial Singh. We feel sorry at his destiny and well meaning defiance against the unjust world which seems to be bent upon ruining him completely.
The proceeding events in the story reiterate this fact, but for Bishna what is more tormenting is the fact that Bhagta, one of his closest, also considers him as a social outlaw. Gurdial Singh writes, "Bhagta was convinced it was all Bishna’s fault" (82). He believes that Bishna’s impulsiveness and his rash treatment of the survey official who had come on duty to tell Bishna that his house lay in the way of the proposed road led to their arrest. He also believes that if Bishna had not assaulted the officials in and if he had not involved himself in a furious tirade of abuses with another official in Mandi, things would have been different. He is even infuriated at Bishna’s abject denial of accepting land elsewhere in compensation and simply being obdurate about not vacating the house only because it was the government itself which had registered the house on his name and that now that very government wants him to vacate it.

Bhagta is of the view that this is hardly any matter to be so stubborn about. So, gradually Bhagta forsakes Bishna and is more concerned about his own well-being. He even tries to Bishna but to no avail. Ultimately, caught in the web of court cases the two brothers have to try hard to secure bails for themselves. This makes Bhagta all the more annoyed with Bishna. He holds his brother responsible for putting everybody in tight spots.

In the court, Bhagta feels intimidated by the administrator's stern looks. He recalls how Bishna had treated the administrator in a sarcastic manner by not replying in a humble, straightforward manner. Bishna had addressed him as if he was the cause of all troubles saying, “Huzoor, when we got the registry done, we’d off loaded piles of currency notes on this very table. And still you say we have no claim on this property?”(84). Though deep inside Bhagta knows that Bishna has been wronged against, he still feels furious. He feels infuriated for not being able to spare himself the harassment and embarrassment. Because of Bishna’s overpowering presence in the court, he feels disgusted at seconding his brother. He even regrets missing the chance to wriggle out of the mess. He feels totally disoriented at the call of their names in the court for hearing which resound repeatedly in his ears.
On reaching home, Bhagta feels tired and worn out. He is further tormented by Kartari’s side remarks, taunts and enquiries. Bhagta does not like Kartari’s insinuation about his brother but refuses to say anything. Facing such indifference, Kartari pours out her discontentment on the children too. Bhagta lies down to rest but Bishna’s arrogance in the court and Kartari’s ravings do not let him sleep. He feels helplessly torn apart.

In this episode the reader comes across the blunt Bishna once again. His refusal to be cowed down, his blatant disagreement, his abject self-righteousness and his defiant disapproval of authority not only emerge as his tragic flaws but are threatening to become suicidal for him and for his brother. Bishna fails to assess the impending disaster for him in the form of this course case. Maintaining his stubborn stand, he continues to annoy all those who matter in this case one after the other. His uncompromising attitude seems to prophesize doom for all. Bishna finds it hard to accept the changing pace of time and the need to change with it. His dispossession and displacement therefore becomes representative of his lot which suffers in an attempt to maintain their self-respect, but actually ruin themselves in the process of upholding the same.

In this quest for maintaining his honour, Bishna swears to avenge all his wrong-doers. While talking to Daya Kaur, after returning home from Mandi, he proclaims, “If I don’t avenge each and every act of these sons of a bitch, who would ever call me Bishna!” (88). Here, he hints at the witness Thola Singhra who testified Bishna’s crime in the court and at the sardars who bribe him for this. Continuing in the same frame of mind, Bishna pours out his despise for all such ill-meaning and dubious ones saying:

Every lame goon has become a Chaudhry, and every concubine, a village chief! Ask them who they are and they’ll say, I’m Bhagat so and so. Rascals, tell me, do Bhagats ever give false testimony in the court of law? They oil their beard,
wrap silk scarves around their necks, prostrate themselves in the Gurudwaras and start thinking they’re the true disciples of the Guru! Guru doesn’t even care to make their bodies rot.(88,89)

Unable to suppress his annoyance and disgust for the system, Bishna further questions it relevance and authenticity as:

Is this the way the governments function? Is this justice? First make laws and then break them yourself. Then turn around and say, You have defied the law! You’ve had an encounter with the police! Police encounter, indeed! As though we had raised forts and smuggle cannons. We’ll see when the time comes. Then these false witnesses won’t know where to hide their long beards... (90)

Bishna and Daya Kaur spend the entire night restlessly.

The following morning, a petty aspiring politician Buta visits Bishna and Daya Kaur. He promises to relieve them of this problem when his party comes to power. He assures them of putting an end to this injustice and bad governance. A little later Hetiya, pays a visit to Bishna’s house and he relates his own tale of woes working as a muneem for the “bloodsuckers”, - his own caste of moneylenders. He tells Bishna, “All they want is money. And for that, they are willing to call a donkey their father” (96). Forgetting his own worries for sometime, Bishna feels immense pity for Hetiya who has been exploited by his ‘own’. But soon, when Hetiya tells Bishna, “You didn’t do the right thing...” (96), the latter gets infuriated with him too. Hetiya continues to annoy Bishna when he says, “You’re as naive as a new born” and Bishna lashes out on him unable to suppress his anger and asks him to leave.
This episode serves a critical purpose in the novel. It does not help much in moving the story forward but serves as the writer's comment on society, law, judiciary, politics, money and power. Through the speeches of Bishna, Buta and Hetiya, Gurdial Singh exposes the social scenario and the political set up. Beginning with the hard-hitting comments of Bishna on the government and the police rule, the writer assesses the lop-sided governance and its corrupt officials through Buta who pretends to know all about it. On the question of the intolerable slavery of the leaders, Buta explains the power game to Bishna saying:

Bhai, these Britishers, these bloody rascals forced their way into our country and started looting us. They made our people work like animals and enjoyed themselves. As they are now in control of everything from governance to army, they're the ones who are powerful. Now we have to grab power from them so that we can gain control over everything. Then our slavery would end and we'll be free... (94)

Little does Buta realize that the vicious cycle of power will never stop. From the traitors who assisted the British to the present self-benefactors who care very little for the common people, there seems to be no respite from suppression and oppression. However, he is painfully aware that unity could be the only panacea from all evils. He tells Bishna:

But our people simply can't stick together. The Muslims are looking in one direction and the Sikhs in another. One of the Muslim parties says that it wants a separate country-Pakistan. And the Britishers are quite shrewd. They keep encouraging both the communities. Their policy is simple-divide and rule.(94)
Through him the writer voices his concern over the need to stay united against the onslaughts of outsiders (here the capitalists) and maintain brotherhood to protect the interest of all. His anguish about the deep penetrated ills in society, the root cause of it all being money, is further voiced through Hetiya’s plight who suffers at the hands of his ‘own’ caste because he is a have-not. He has suffered so many insults at the hands of his ‘own’ that he is totally disillusioned and remarks, “This caste is really wretched if you ask me” (96), telling Bishna how he has been tortured by them making him slog day and night.

Further in the story, the writer makes, subtle comments on Bishna’s self-inflicted pain through Hetiya once again who believes that Bishna has made a grave mistake in daring to rise up against the ‘all powerful’ state by challenging it and not conforming to its new policies. In a way, the hint is at the lop-sided power play in which the weak and the vulnerable Bishna is bound to suffer. The suggestion made here is that the legally rightful too can be dispossessed and disowned by all mighty state with the connivance of the desperate and unscrupulous ones like Thola Singhara.

The further events in the novel prove this to be correct. On the third hearing, the two brothers are sentenced to three months of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of hundred rupees each even though Bishna tries his best to get Bhagta acquitted. However, Bishna’s genuine concern for Bhagta suffers a nasty blow when the latter asks his brother-in-law Teja to take care of his business and take Gokul’s help if needed. Like Sajjan in Night of the Half Moon, Bhagta can be seen siding with the enemy in order to prosper. All this hurts Bishna tremendously.

However, unlike Bhagta, Bishna does not fall from his dignity in order to arrange for the survival of Daya Kaur. In addition to the four carts on rent, he allows Buta to set up his oil mill also on rent in one of the corner of his compound. Buta, helps Daya Kaur in the absence of Bishna and feels happy about it. As for Daya Kaur, her repressed maternity finds expression in her love towards Buta’s
children. Overwhelmed by affection, she cares for them as her own although she is always aware of their caste as Muslims. Nevertheless, she soon drops the idea of good and evil, pure and impure after Buta explains to her,

"Bharjai, these good and evil actions are the creation of maulvis and pandits. A man is a man after all, and a man alone has the power to elevate himself to the level of god. To inflict suffering on others is an evil act and to work towards the well being of others is a good act. Rest is all hammer ..." (100)

Daya Kaur enjoys a beautiful relation with Buta’s children. They soon take Maghi and Kala’s places who they have been restricted to visit Daya Kaur by Kartari.

Daya Kaur feels a deep pain within because she has done nothing to deserve this kind of treatment from Kartari. Such mental torments finally take their toll and as days pass, Daya Kaur starts behaving strangely. She drives away Thola Singhra who comes to their house with evil in his heart. She thunders at him saying,

"This is the last time you are stepping into my courtyard. If I ever see you around, I’m going to break your legs. First you appear as a false witness and then you have the cheek to feign sympathy...You son of a bitch! (102)

Later she lashes out on Santi who has the audacity to face Daya Kaur with queries about her and Thola Singhra. That night in a fit of anger, rolling her eyes and head, she curses each of the wrongdoers. Buta’s children are terrified at this sight and lie huddled together. When Buta returns in the morning, he finds Daya Kaur lying unconscious on her Manji. After learning about the previous night’s
events from his children, he goes to fetch Kartari who once again shows her rotten inside refusing to attend to her saying, “Those who offer shelter to all kinds of low caste people in their courtyard, should have no qualms about eating food cooked by them”. (106)

Having been turned down thus, Buta takes upon himself the responsibility of the house and Daya Kaur. Who pronounces her vow to ruin Thola Singhra as she says:

Now you just wait and see, what Baba reduce that dog to.
He’ll scrounge through a garbage heap with his nails, and wail his guts out. But never shall I forgive him! Baba says we must never forgive such a sinner. (107)

Buta tries his best to control and clam her but a turmoiled Daya Kaur refuses to be pacified.

With the passage of time, Daya Kaur behaves even more strangely. She rolls like a possessed woman every evening and it wakes up through the night till dawn. She even makes a scarecrow and hits it with her jutti every now and then. She soon becomes the topic of discussion in the nearby villages. Some well-wishers do visit her but only to be ignored. Like the lonely Daya Kaur, Budha also suffers loneliness and dejection finding it hard to live under Kartari’s imposing disposition. On knowing about Budha’s plight, Daya Kaur scolds him for not coming back to his ‘own’ house. Budha empties out his heart telling her:

In this house, Daya Kaure, I had ruled like a king! But now, I have to wear out my bones in this sizzling heat and on top of that, listen to all kinds of nasty things. Bhai treated me like his own son. Bhagta also looked after me well for three to four months. But Daya Kaure, the house in which a woman rules doesn’t proper ever. So finally, I left. (110)
Daya Kaur offers all assistance to Budha to sustain him till Bishna returns. She treats him hospitably and the two share their emotions about avenging Thola and his ilk.

While the noble hearted Daya Kaur still manages to pull on, Kartari burns in jealousy. She indulges in foul talk about Daya Kaur with other bania women blaming her and Bishna for her own misery. Kartari wastes much of her time in this manner and she is least bothered about controlling her ruffian brother who is pinching on her money by dishonest means. She simply ignores the matter and refuses to deal plainly with him. However she soon comes to her sense when she is finally jolted by the increased expresses and decreased income. When she broaches the matter with Teja, he simply disappears after a couple of days.

Left to her own misery, Kartari finds it hard to run the house. At this time of need, Daya Kaur sends a bagful of wheat through Budha although he disproves of showing any kindness to such an ungrateful woman. At one such time Daya Kaur says, ‘Let it be! ... She has to pay for her deeds, and we for our own. Besides, why be vindictive with your own children” (116). The noble Daya Kaur fondly feeds Maghi and Kala who now visit her every evening. She feels immense pleasure in their company. But even this offers no cure to her fits every night and Buta feels really concerned about her. He even suggests that she should visit her parents house but Budha tells him that she is as stubborn and stern as her husband and that she has not been on talking terms with her parents for the last ten years because of a small argument with her brother.

Life continues and Daya Kaur helps Budha in crafting articles. She also insists that he should keep all that he earns. Budha marvels how she manages to keep four children happy and well fed without enough resources. Even as Buta proposes to help, Daya Kaur scolds him saying lovingly.
What do you think of yourself, you bootlicking toady? ...You think Daya Kaur is some beggar woman and you’re some great benefactor? So now you’re going to help it manage.(118)

Daya Kaur feels seriously offended to accept help from an outsider and her independence and self-sufficiency shines even in the bleakest of times.

In these two episodes that narrate the events in the households of Bishna and Bhagta in their absence, stark contrasts are offered. On one hand, is the unstoppable and unsubdued Daya Kaur who refuses to be put down by trying circumstances and who manages to ‘survive’ running her house smoothly. On the other hand, is the good for nothing Kartari who is unable to manage her household affairs and finds it hard to even feed her own children. Whereas Daya Kaur finds reasons to be happy in the company of even outsiders, Kartari lashes out on her own children in helplessness. Daya Kaur’s industriousness also finds contrast in Kartari’s careless waste of time in idle talk which brings no good to her. A self respecting Daya Kaur not only supports Buta and his children but also helps Budha to establish himself again whereas Kartari has no control either on her brother, or on her house.

Through these events the writer highlights the power of goodness and nobility over selfishness and cunningness. However, the writer also shows the more somber side of stoicism in Daya Kaur’s loud cursing and in her gradual loss over her senses. He turns the coin to show how life takes turns and how the people with a stiff backbone suffer at the hands of an unsympathetic society. Gurdial Singh also shows how common men wait patiently for divine justice to intervene when the man-made system fails them. Daya Kaur too waits for heaven to intervene to punish her offender Thola.
Finally, the day of Bishna’s release dawns and Daya Kaur frantically prepares for his return. Desperate to see her husband, she occasionally becomes restless but finds some solace in the company of Buta’s and Bhagta’s children. Their playful mischiefs keep her occupied till Bishna announces his arrival with his characteristic loud battle cry. Daya Kaur feels elated and joins him in raising even louder cries. Bishna is happy to return home and find it occupied by four young angels. All of them enjoy their meal together. After the others retire to sleep, Daya Kaur finishes her work in the kitchen and later, appraising Bishna’s face carefully, she notices his sunken eyes and pronounced pockmarks but feels comforted by his undampened spirits showing in the glow on his face which assure her that he is still the same.

After some time, Bishna is jolted out of sleep by Daya Kaur’s screams as she rolls her head frantically. He occasionally curses his sinners while he continues to sing *shabads* as the possessed Daya Kaur shouts and screams. After much suffering, she calms down but falls drained out on the bed. Seeing her in so much agony, Bishna invokes divine justice to punish the evil doers and the crooked ones like Thola, who use law as a tool to exploit others. Bishna pours out his anger saying:

No cobbler is going to use your flesh...it’s the flesh of a die hard sinner ... Our sarkaar! ... Where will you and your sarkaar go?...When Baba decides to work his miracles you won’t even have the time to bat an eyelid ... Law! ... Our law!... ruffians like you are the ones who’ve framed these laws, isn’t it? ... I’ll swallow all your laws in a single go... yes! ... In a single go .... (126)

In the morning Bishna and Budha resume their work. The two enjoy each others company and Bishna narrates the tales of his expedition to the prison with a child like enthusiasm for a couple of days. However, as time takes its toll, Bishna turns moody and restless. He ventures out into the streets and inspecting the
havelis he blurts out, “The mortar in these bricks is nothing but blood, yes blood!” (130). He moves on to find Maghni Bania busy making some entries in his account books. Bishna abhors the filthy dwelling of Maghni and his unkempt appearance saying, “He too will claim that he lived a man’s life!” (131).

On an earlier occasion too, Maghni had become the target of Bishna’s anger and was beaten up by him when he troubled Daya Kaur for a mere twenty paise credit. Pondering over the relevance of the birth of such low ones like Maghni and Thola, Bishna speculates over other questions such as the mystery of all creations and feels overwhelmed. He also feels totally out of place among the half constructed houses, the newly built ones and the memory of his demolished house also pains him greatly. The anguish in his heart grows beyond his control and his legs begin to tremble, tire wear out. He decides to go back home where he goes off to sleep exhausted and overwhelmed.

Through this episode, the depth of Bishna’s feeling of alienation and dispossession from his ‘own’ place can be clearly felt by the readers. He behaves almost like an alien in his own land and his sense of rootedness and belongingness seems to dissolve away slowly and gradually. Apart from this, the separation from his dwelling, weight him down heavily. Bishna feels perpetually tortured by the flourishing of the unscrupulous ones who live comfortable lives while many deserving ones like him suffer endlessly. His heart pains to see how the ones who live by crooked means rise in society while the hard workers are further relegated to the margins. His quest for understanding God’s ways is representative of the search of many like him who live and die deprived lives while their oppressors roll in wealth.

On the other side, Bhagta too confines himself to the bed. On the third day of his return, finding it hard to restrain herself, Kartari comes to her usual self and pours her choice it rebukes on him saying, “How long will you keep lying like a worm infested dog? You think someone is going to offer you a pension to feed the three mouths (135). She does not stop at this and says:
Had you been worth anything, you'd have built silver walls here. I'm convinced that until they don't pull each and every hair out of your head, you won't come to your senses. When you're so keen on following them around like a dog.... (135)

She even hurl abuscs at Bishna and Daya Kaur. Bhagta tries to silence her but she refuses to be subdued. Finally, Bhagta charges at her with a wet log of wood and she trips over a pidhi and falls unconscious. The commotion in Bhagta's house reaches out and people gather to smoothen things. Budha also tries to pacify Bhagta by saying:

These women have wisdom tucked in somewhere behind their plait. If a man were to follow them, he'd ruin his home. What's your worry? If you want, I'll come and help you out with the work from tomorrow. If you're scared of the domestic squabbles, we'll rent a place somewhere along the main road. This daily bickering can cost a man his life! (137)

He speaks like this for a long time but Bhagta is only able to register six magical words Budha speaks among many words of wisdom. These are, "Bhai, is there to protect us. It was as though the words had as many colours as a rainbow. Time and again, those colours danced before his eyes, but they refused to fall into a neat pattern" (137).

These words, as the colours of a rainbow dance flutteringly in front of him. Deeply agitated and haunted by numerous thoughts, Bhagta goes to the terrace to avoid further preachings. In the evening Budha returns to relieve him of his anguish with the suggestion that they would work in Hukam Chand's compound to avoid any further unpleasantness with Kartari.
In this episode, Bhagta shows his intolerance towards Kartari’s unjustified bickering. The losing of control by Bhagta is suggestive of his intolerance towards her loose tongue in future. His choice of a workplace away from the house and Kartari’s nagging in indicative of Bhagta’s desire for peace and better business.

As expected, after a few months Bhagta’s business picks up well and Bishna feels happy when Budha tells him about it. As for Bishna, he manages to survive somehow. He receives none of the promised assistance from his friends and carves out things from whatever left over wood he has. However, Bishna is satisfied with whatever humble earnings he makes which are just enough to keep him afloat.

In contrast to the contended Bishna, Bhagta swells up with success and plans to get into a partnership with Daleep, a carpenter, and buys a wood slicing machine. Bishna feels happy about this whereas Daya Kaur asks Budha to warn Bhagta and be aware of the shrewd Daleep. With the new found wealth, Kartari flaunts it around with colorful dresses. Her meanness prevents her from visiting Daya Kaur and she restricts even her children from going over to Bishna’s house. However, Kala and Maghi slyly escape to their taayi’s house. Daya Kaur’s maternal instinct feels satisfied and gratified each time they visit her and she displays her love by making various sweets and dishes for them.

In spite of all their nobility and kindness Bishna and Daya Kaur are destined to face some extremely trying times ahead. Buta has to leave the place on Bishna’s instructions as Toti Mal has own the case against Bishna and he forcibly gets his Kothri vacated with the assistance from the police while Bishna is away. A helpless and ailing Daya Kaur tries hard to stop them but fails. She drops down exhausted on the manji while the police put her outside in the middle of the road. When Bishna returns, he defiantly challenges Toti Mal and his accomplices. He breaks open the lock of the Kothri put by Toti Mal and throws back his belongings into it. He carries the unconscious Daya Kaur in his arms and he feels great pity for her. Finally, he retires to rest forgetting to lock the door.
This inhuman treatment of Bishna and Daya Kaur by Toti Mal is a reflection of the callousness of the business community, here the Bania class, which forgets all laws of humanity while dealing with humans themselves. Buta aptly describes this class telling Bishna, "Bhaiji, to tell you very honestly, this is what business does to you. It makes a man lose both his integrity and dignity. Whosoever gets into the trap of business, loses his humanity forever ..." (141).

He truly exposes the vices of the businessmen for whom every human is a commodity and for whom every interaction with them is a deal towards prosperity. Here, through Buta, Gurdial Singh comments on this dehumanized community which fails to treat the unsuccessful ones with compassion.

It is apparently the writer’s own disgust for such blood suckers that features in the speech of Buta. Gurdial Singh attacks all those who consider money above men and affluence above affection. Through the terrible treatment of Daya Kaur, he criticizes the so called powerful to think they can exercise power over the meek and vulnerable as a matter of right. The writer is also critical of all the heartless onlookers who do nothing to stand against tyranny and injustice only because they themselves are not a direct target. They rather feel fortunate that it is not them but someone else who suffers. This criticism also continues in the following chapter where the gossip mills churn against Bishna and Daya Kaur.

However, least bothered about public opinion, Bishna and Daya Kaur busy themselves to set up their scattered things once again. They also decide to build another Kothri in the corner vacated by Buta. Bishna’s stoic endurance and his stiff resistance once again comes to his rescue when he tells a hurt and emotional Budha:

You shouldn’t lose heart! These are just games people play. Just like a child that flails its arms and legs and bites into its own flesh. Come to think of it, yesterday it was almost like a
festival here with a crowd around. Today, it’s no less hectic. In a day or two, they’ll demolish this kothri again, slap another court case against us. We too will create trouble for them and so it’ll carry on. (147)

Bishna completes much of the work by pulling down the old shack to construct a new Kothri before the nigh could set in. Before the next sunset they construct two walls of their house to be almost waist high even skipping their regular meal. It is heart warming to see them work hard inspite of all difficulties. Their indomitable courage in starting life afresh after every calamity, is exemplary. The couple’s selfless showering of love and affection on other desolates like Budha and Hetiya is also commendable.

Treasuring Bishna’s sincerity and friendship Hetiya says to him, “Ultimately it’s always a man who comes to the rescue of another man. God knows what goes on in each human heart but the way friends share your sorrow, who else can?” (150).

Disillusioned with his own community he further says:

The wise men say it is only he who wears the shoe knows where it pinches. Only a suffering man knows what it is to suffer. Bishan Singh, these banias are an awful community! In fact, a businessman can hardly be called a man. I’m not going to work as a muneem for these banias anymore. They expect me to bathe all their grandsons in the family. They are the ones, Bishan Singh, whose bodies rot with worms. We had a multimillionaire seth in our part of the country. He owned thirty villages... still that wretched fellow met with a dreadful end. (151)
By showing close affinity and bonding between all the deprived and dispossessed ones, Gurdial Singh seems to reiterates the fact that pain speaks the same language and its effect can be mitigated only by sharing it. Whether it is the dispossessed Bishna, the desolate Budha or the discarded Hetiya, all of them share a common destiny of being the deprived ones and they all share their destinies with each other with the intent of relieving each other of its sting.

However, there seems to be no respite for Bishna as for now. He receives summons regarding illegal possession of Toti Mal’s property. This fresh notice disturbs Bishna and he feels uneasy. Daya Kaur once again slips into one of her fits while Bishna works frantically into the night smoothing wooden beams, he alone knows for what.

Soon Bishna lands in jail once again because of his temperamental dealing with Toti Mal. This time Bhagta turns a blind eye to his confinement and this time when Kartari explodes out on Bishna and Daya Kaur’s unreasonableness he does not seem to mind. He even thinks that he had been stupid enough to follow them till now and if he had parted with them earlier, he would have been well established by now.

Harbouring such cunning thoughts in his heart, he even accepts Toti’s proposal to get another piece of land allotted in his name in lieu of his share in the confiscated house. The deal is settled. Accordingly, Bhagta writes off a portion of that land equivalent to Toti’s compound in Toti’s name who in turn writes off the compound where Bishna and Daya Kaur live in Bhagta’s name. The latter is lured by the proposal because Bishna has no successor and Bhagta and his sons would be the ultimate benefactors. Kartari feels overjoyed to know about this arrangement from Bhagta. She helps dispel to whatever little doubts and reservations Bhagta has. Bhagta too decides to go ahead with this deal disregarding Toti’s unfair treatment of Bishna and Daya Kaur.
Bhagta also manages to wrangle out a plot of one kanal of land just opposite to the house from which his family was dislocated. This he manages to do by announcing that he desires to live independent of Bishna and that he deserves his share as Bishna's brother. Bhagta gives thirteen marlas to Toti as promised and protects the remaining seven marlas with a boundary wall planning to set up a second work-place there.

When Daya Kaur comes to know about Bhagta's unscrupulous deal through Budha, she once again falls into a prolonged fit and curses Bhagta and Kartari all through the night. Her condition starts deteriorating by the day. She goes around in dirty clothes and unkempt hair without bathing for days together. She becomes quite a dread for the children and the passers by. Occasionally, Budha, Kania and Hetiya do show up at her house, but suffering her abuses they return hurt and concerned.

After some days Budha returns to her after visiting Bishna in the jail. He tells her about Bishna's decision to discontinue living in the disputed compound anymore. She understands Budha's concerns and pacifies him saying, "As is his wish and Baba's order, of course. But why do you worry? Were we born with this house? Houses can be made wherever people drop anchor. Why be so attached to the soil?" (163-164). Budha understands her and feels convinced about her decision keeping in mind Bhagta's callousness.

This time Bishna returns to an un-expectant Daya Kaur who has other petty issues on her mind than to prepare for his return. When Bishna comes back, he finds a completely disoriented Daya Kaur. He soon asks her to leave the house with him to which she agrees without much resistance. With only one little garvi, the two leave the house hollering loud battle cries like "Bole So Nihal" and "Sat Sri Akal". The two walk through the street and pass by Bhagta's house hollering their battle cries again and again.
Calling out to Bhagta, Bishna tells him, "You’d better look after your property now. We’re going off. We’re taking away just this garvi and the clothes we’re wearing. The rest is all yours." (166).

After this both Bishna and Daya Kaur walk towards the main gate of Mandi while some intrigued Bania women secretly peer at them through the crevices of their doors. Part one of this novel ends with the desertion of the house inhabited by Bishna and Daya Kaur which now looks more like a cremation ground because the two that made it come alive have left it abandoned and scattered with their meager belongings.

The episodes relating Bhagta’s desertion of Bishna and Daya Kaur and then about the two deserting their house are cleverly juxtaposed by the writer by narrating them one after the other. He compares and contrasts the natures of Bhagta and Kartari and Bishna and Daya Kaur in these two episodes. Whereas, the ungrateful Bhagta and Kartari forsake Bishna and Daya Kaur in the worst of times for personal benefits, the latter leave whatever belongs to them so that Bhagta prospers without trouble. They voluntarily renounce everything. In contrast to Bhagta’s selfishness and cunningness, Bishna and Daya Kaur’s selflessness is what elevates them to heroism. The two stand towering high above Bhagta and Kartari in their brave acceptance of destiny and their open disapproval of being disowned. Instead of sticking on with the thankless Bhagta and Kartari, Bishna and Daya Kaur find it easier to leave everything to them and start life anew. What comes more strikingly to the reader is their undaunted spirit even after suffering so much. Their stoicism is commendable even when the entire system and society along with their own have turned against them.

Structurally, the beginning of part two of this novel does not serve any specific purpose. This chapter is in the form of an interlude in the story in which two characters Rama and Surjan make brief appearances. Through them, the writer expounds on some pertinent issues. Where in the character of Rama, Gurdial Singh
voices spirituality and wisdom, through Surjan he portrays a ruffian who infuriates the self-respecting Bishna.

This chapter begins with the visit of Rama Akali to Bishna’s house on the outskirts of the village. He is old and blind and visits Bishna regularly. The two enjoy each other’s company sharing the secrets of God and God’s most mysterious creation man. Bishna often puts forward his queries. Asking, “Akalia, you’re a wise man. Tell me, why doesn’t a man’s desire ever die?” (170). To this Rama answers:

Bishan Singha, desire is a worm in a cotton plant. It doesn’t ever die. We, the worldly creatures trapped in the chores of domesticity, are not able to shake off its multiple burdens. Only those who’re destined to follow a spiritual path can possibly seek liberation. If we reflect on Baba’s Bani, we realize that salvation is the easiest thing to achieve. It’s no more than a game, all we need to do is to cultivate divine love. It’s this love Bishan Singha that transforms a Bhagat into a Bhagwan. Without love, this world won’t exist, and without love, man’s life is meaningless. Love alone has the power to unite the lovers. When two lovers meet, they’re not able to recognize each other ... It’s almost as if consciousness too becomes a captive of the gross. Bishan Singha, desires die only if we exercise willful control over our lust. And it’s love that helps us triumph over lust. In order to control lust, we need to control the play of the three virtues. Be modest, seek forgiveness for your wrongdoings and love the rest to God... . (170)

Then Bishna enquires, “Akalia, what’s this thing called man that god has created?” (170) Rama Akali tries to answer him by giving a universally accepted and followed answer that:
Bishna Singha, in a way, man is cast in the living image of the creator. Satguru says, Khalsa is a special image of mine! But if he were to go astray, then he could also become demon like, a menacing figure. Come to think of it, man is almost like a water bubble, but man is Kabir, Farid and Namdev as well, may Satguru be thanked for his gracious blessings! It's not within our powers to sing of his grace but each of Hari's creation should be as Hari Himself... (170)

Through such interactions between the two, it is Gurdial Singh's own spiritual quest and queries about the mysteries of creation that come clearly across to the reader. Probably, his own search for such clarifications has been voiced through Bishna's queries. Also, Rama Akali's answers seem to echo the writer's own understanding of the drama of creation. This chapter serves a specific purpose of revealing the more sublime side of Bishna's character. Though, he does not comprehend fully what Rama says to him, nevertheless, the very fact that such questions have been put forward by him, hint at his spiritual quest to understand the entire cosmic creation.

The short episode of the crude entry of Surjan, 'the bear', who is an uncultured and unrefined Jat offers to suggest that it is not money that the self-sufficient and self-respecting people like Bishna want, it is respect that they demand. Just as Rama observes,

One should know how to speak, or at least make a polite request. Bishan Singha, some men are worse than animals. People with just live to eat, serve no purpose. Guru Sahib says when an animal dies, he serves ten purposes but when a man dies, he serves no purpose! (172)

Bishna agrees with Rama and he voices out his disgust with the Jat community saying:
Akalia, these people think we are daily wagers. If a Jat were to get even a ship made from us, he would happily forget all about it later. And if we were to get a sack of fodder from his fields, he would keep reminding us for the next seven generations. Akalia, I find it so hard to accept such arrogance! I work hard and earn my own living, so why should I put with such nonsense? (172)

The next chapter continues in the philosophic strain of the previous chapter, making it even more pertinent.

Bishna now enjoying the unconditional love of Santu, his wife and three children and both Bishna and Daya Kaur forget that they are childless and have no one as family. Santu and his family take good care of them. Bishna and Daya Kaur feel particularly attached to Santu's son Dhoter who playfully hovers around them all day long. Life become easier for this old couple and Bishna, like the prince of his tale that he narrates to Dhoter, feels that he too would like to make a journey into his past good and bad, a creation of his own, even if it meant losing the fairyland ahead of him and plunging into a pit of darkness. Capturing his wishes Gurdial writes:

From the day he had gained consciousness to the day he left Mandi, he had built whatever he wanted on either side on his track. And whatever he didn't like, he had simply pulled down and destroyed. All the same, he had left behind his footprints upon those rough mishapen pathways. But now for the past ten or twelve years, he felt, as if he had been standing on the hilltop, just looking at the world he had both created and destroyed. Sometimes, he felt that he should stand there as long as someone didn't push him into the dark.
chasm ahead. And at others, he felt that he should simply retrace his steps, and come right back. In the process if everything he had created must be destroyed, then so be it. (185)

This wishful retracing of steps desired by Bishna is like the secret wish of every mortal who wavers between patient waiting for death as paradise or retiring into the past to erase it and begin life afresh even if paradise itself is at stake. Such is man's desire for life and such is life's lure that he does not want to part with his body and dissolve into infinity where he has no individual identity. Almost all mortals are attached to this extremely involving drama of creation and wish to retrace their steps back and undo some of their deeds, so as to begin life once again. It is pertinent to mention here that, it is not that Bishna feels sorry for whatever he has done in the past but that he wants to have another chance at life. But where does this happen?

So Bishna too feels compelled and obliged to continue with his single chance at life. He and Daya Kaur shift to the another place to save Santu's wife the trouble of cooking for them. But when they have set up everything and are ready to leave, Santu's wife lovingly objects to their departure saying:

If this is how you had to leave overnight like thieves, then you shouldn't have been so close to us! Who knows, perhaps we're destined to earn our livelihood only because of your blessings. If I hadn't touched your feet in the mornings and evenings and brought you food, you could have told us, You're not feeding us, what will we eat? (187)

Later Santu announces that he would get back all their things and they would live together. Bishna and Daya Kaur are deeply touched by this loving gesture. However, after much resistance they are able to convince Santu and his
family, about living separately but only after they agree to accept meals twice a day from them.

After some days, Daya Kaur falls seriously ill and Bishna stubbornly refuses to shift back even after much persuasion from Santu. Daya Kaur’s condition deteriorates further leaving her nothing more than “a sack of swollen bones”. Budha, who is now himself in a bad condition with failed eyesight and an amputated arm, comes to enquire about Daya Kaur. Bishna dissolves into a philosophic mood saying to Budha, “Budheya, what a piece of work god has created in man!” He continues saying:

When he expands the size of creatures, he makes them so huge that they begin to look almost like demons. And some like King Indra grow so big that they find it hard to carry their own weight. But when he decides the other way, he does what children do to a balloon—fill it up with air and then prick it. So some people are reduced to mere flies and insects. That’s how man leaves this world, my bhai. (190)

The prolonged ailment that Daya Kaur is subjected to, drains out Bishna and in a bout of nostalgia he bluntly tells Santu’s daughters not to come to their house and to tell their mother not to send food for them. He refuses to accept any further help and cares for Daya Kaur all day long. One day, Bhagta comes to visit them and while his therapeutic visit cures Daya Kaur a little, it infuriates Bishna who leaves feeling uneasy. Later when Sayal Kaur talks at length about Bhagta and his family Bishna simply refuses to listen to her.

On earlier occasions too, Bhagta did make a couple of dry visits to Bishna’s house but the latter never goes to see how Bhagta and his family live. Though Daya Kaur becomes restless at times to see them, Bishna’s temperament always restricts her from expressing herself. On his present visit, Daya Kaur tells Bhagta to get Kala and Maghi to her but she does not survive to see them and dies the following night.
Bishna arranges for all the last rites himself. He immediately cuts short any sympathies saying, “Everyone has to go there, it’s just a question of two days earlier, or two days later. Besides, now that I’m relieved of my responsibility, won’t that help me prepare for my own journey?” (193).

After the cremation only a few people come to condole her death and that too out of compulsion. After some days of living alone, loneliness gnaws at Bishna. He feels restless in his house and often lies down to gaze at the stars. He figures Daya Kaur’s face among the stars and is pained all the more. He feels drained out of all energy and silent tears flow from his eyes. One morning he wakes up in great physical pain and anguish after one such desolate night.

This chapter reveals the undiluted self-respect of Bishna once again. His ego refuses to accept help forever. He turns down all the well meaning gestures of Santu and his family because of this self-dependence and honour. Even as he suffers alone after Daya Kaur’s death he never indulges is self-pity. He even quietness all voices of sympathy knowing they do not mean well. His show of non-attachment in front of the outsiders actually melts into his deep longing to be with Daya Kaur. In this episode the readers come across a mellowed Bishna who silently suffers but stoically endures his personal loss though he find it hard to hide his feelings. The reader also feels sorry at his fate because now having lost his only support, Bishna is left alone to face the society and its onslaughts.

In this desperate time, Rama Akali’s companionship and his interpretation of the Gurbani provides great comfort to Bishna. He starts respecting Rama all the more for his learnedness. Bishna also finds regular companionship in Budha and Santu. He feels quite at ease in their company. However, Bishna gets infuriated at Bhagta’s hypocrisy in begging him to come and stay at ‘their’ house only because he is afraid of the people who would point fingers at him. Bishna avoids the issue saying that he would decide in a day or two and inform Bhagta, who seems to be more concerned about his own reputation, that he had so scrupulously built.
Sensing Bishna’s disapproval, Bhagta pleads with Santu to persuade Bishna to shift over to his house.

Santu refuses to do so. Instead, he opens up his heart saying that he would look after Bishna till death because he and his family feel naturally attached to him. As for Bishna whenever he thinks of going to live with Bhagta in Mandi, something stabs him deep inside. However, suffering such from loneliness and disoriented thoughts, he surprisingly leaves with Bhagta without much resistance.

In this chapter the writer contrasts the societal fears of Bhagta with the genuine concern of Santu for Bishna. Where Bhagta, Bishna’s ‘own’ brother, wants to take him along only because of societal pressures, Santu wants Bishna to live with him because of sincere love for him. Here, the writer hits hard on such shows of concern by ‘one’s own’ only because of the fear of ruining one’s social standing or ‘bubble reputation’ as Shakespeare calls it. Through this chapter, Gurdial Singh also comments on the relevance of such a reputation that depends upon selfish motives and stands a danger of being ruined by the ones who have had no hand in making it.

Bishna’s departure for Bhagta’s house despite his reservations, marks a very significant development in this story. Where it hints at the softening of Bishna’s self-esteem, it also subtly hints at his helpless resignation to circumstances that are bent upon shattering him completely. Among all this, the reader silently wishes that Bishna does not have to face further adversities.

Bishna’s stay at Bhagta’s house in Mandi brings about new revelations to him. Bishna feels deeply hurt on seeing the huge haveli constructed on the compound which was sold by Bhagta to the seths for a couple of thousand rupees. He feels a curious urge to leave the place refusing to live a life of an outsider. Bishna shifts to the other house owned by Bhagta built on the land he got from the government in lieu of the acquired house. Here too, Bishna feels like an alien.
When looks at the big houses of the unscrupulous ones, specially that of Shahu, a wicked and sinister man. Bishna feels the taste in his mouth go sour. He feels agitated at ‘their’ new found wealth and prosperity gained by unhealthy means. He also goes to see his own forcibly annexed house but from a distance. For the first time, Bishna becomes aware of the massive change in the world around him which went unnoticed till now because he was never concerned about it. Bishna also realizes that the clever ones have succeeded in making large in life and he feels left out not because he is not one of the prosperous ones but because none of the rich have any traces of humanity and compassion in them. Everybody seems to him busy rat-racing for wealth with no inkling for anything noble and sublime. He naturally feels out of place here.

Bishna’s anxiety and restlessness grow as he becomes aware of the challenges that his loved ones have had to endure but who ultimately lost in the battle against oppressive times. Buta, one of his closest, gets killed in the riots. Hetiya, another of Bishna’s well-wisher, mistakably marries a Muslim and is poisoned by her though he manages to survives but with great difficulty. Kania too has weakened with time and the weight of the years gone by is clearly visible in his deteriorated physique, under nourished children and dilapidated house. Bishna feels deeply pained at their fates and he silently cries on their beaten lives.

Bishna’s mental condition now weighs him down greatly. His work suffers because of such absorptions. His inner agitation keeps him away from any peace whatsoever. Deeply disturbed he asks himself, “Is there anything in this world that I can still call mine?” (212). He is even perturbed as to why he is still alive. His entire life flashes in front of his eyes, good times and bad. He remembers how he was once successful and respectable but then everything and everybody including his own kith and kin turned their backs on him and Daya Kaur. He also recalls how inspite of all hardships, the two did not budge from their position though people called them ignorant and belligerent. He questions God asking him: “What sort of a game is this God…” (213)
Bishna then sets out to pay a visit to another deserted and desolate man like him—Hetiya. On going to his house, Bishna is shocked to see his reduced frame, damaged eye, toothless jaw, shrunken face, hollow checks and skeleton like body. When he sees Hetiya reduced to this state, Bishna absolutely stunned. He feels extremely sorry for Hetiya who still believes that the panacea for all his sufferings, his chemical, will soon be ready. Hetiya's passion and faith strikes Bishna when he says, “Bishna a sinner can never escape. Never ever! The sinners shall ultimately drown in the rivers of hell, that's the way it has to be!” (216) The desperate wish of Hetiya continues as he adds:

All these people who suck our blood... all these Seths and Lalas... I can bet upon it, god will throw all of them into a heap of garbage and turning them into insects. Sin is powerful enough to destroy the manner. (216)

While returning from Hetiya's house, Bishna invariably recalls the tremor in Hetiya's moaning voice along with the fleeting emotions on his face. As Bishna walks back slowly to his Kothri, despising the wealthy seths with heavy paunches whom he sees sitting comfortably after ruining so many like Hetiya, Bishna comes across Thola Mal. He feels extremely agitated on seeing him and speaks to him in a cynical manner. He feels even more disturbed to see how Thola Mal has flourished. Sleep evades him that night.

In these two chapters, what comes out most evidently is the ever increasing divide between the rich and the poor. Bishna becomes aware of how the unfortunate ones continue to suffer endlessly because of poverty and lack of power to change their conditions. The rich in contrast grow all the more wealthy and powerful with every fall of a powerless man. Gurdial Singh here hints at this unbridgeable divide as the sole cause of all miseries and oppression of the have-nots. The helplessness and hopelessness of the 'lesser beings' and their seemingly un-purposeful existence pains the writer and he vents out his anger through Bishna's disgust for Thola Mall's prosperity gained by unscrupulous means.
But all is not lost. Bishna’s lot promises to ‘Survive’ through some like Maghi. Bishna’s non-conformity to the norms and his outright defiance of authority throughout life finds resonance in Maghi’s rebelliousness. This is why Bishna feels drawn towards Maghi and the two come closer as they drink and talk condemning openly whatever they dislike. Bishna feels inexplicably drawn towards Maghi and he appreciates his slender, but athletic frame with strong, muscular limbs. Gurdial Singh explains the strange bond between the two as he writes, “Until now Bishna had always looked upon Maghi as just another fifteen year old-naive, vagrant and an uncouth adolescent. But now suddenly, Bishna felt as though half of Maghi’s soul was his own” (220).

Bishna is even impressed by Maghi’s bold remarks when he says, “Taya, who’s bothered? You should enjoy life, have good fun and die. Does it really matter, whether a person dies sooner or later?” (221). However, Maghi silently fears and despises that Bishna seems to have lost his fire. He tells Bishna:

\[
\text{Tau, our master says, Is there any point in living so long that you simply drag yourself on your knees, and survive on nothing else but dalia? He says, You should rather burn like a lamp and spread light around! Instead of struggling like a burnt out wick, turn into a leaping flame!} (222)
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Maghi thus becomes very special and a close companion of Bishna because he has never heard anybody speak with such fervour and conviction. Maghi’s mischievous manner and his lively spirits lift up Bishna from his dampness. Still confused whether to side with Maghi’s mischief or maintain a distance from him as an elder, Bishna indulges himself in drinking and talking with him. He readily joins in with Maghi in all his naughty talks too.

Maghi is not only witty but also wordly wise. He even mocks at his father’s senseless dealings with the moneylenders like Thola who exploit him to the
maximum while Bhagta refuses to pay them even when he has money and when he knows the interest is piling up. He even proclaims to punish all such exploiters and money hoarders including Bhagta. He tells Bishna:

Now... *Taya* ... do they... deserve to be called .... men? ... Bloody rascals! ... You just wait and see, *Taya*, if we ever come to power ... then I’m going to ... burn all these people alive – including my father, who is, incidentally, your brother, but I don’t care... ! (225)

Bishna is left stunned on hearing this and that what he further says:

I’m going to roast these people ... devour all of them ... roast them ... nice and proper ... *Tayaji!* All these people who have lots of money... about these moneyed people ... our *masterji* says, All of them are real cheats. He say’s, Unless you cheat, you simply can’t make money ... And the biggest frauds are people like my father or like your brother! ...These people ... these people actually enjoy sucking other people’s blood. Now come to think of it, my father has no dearth of anything ... But every day, he and my mother fight with each other like cats and dogs ...She says, I can’t make *rotis* for your brother. Sometimes she says, Why don’t you make *rotis* for your brother. Sometimes she say’s why don’t you buy me a muslin *kurta* and that dumb fool says, I don’t have any money ... but he doesn’t eve respond to her statement about the *roti* ... doesn’t even refer to it again ... donkeys! *Tauji*, these people are mean! ... Bloody donkeys!...You should know how to look after the person who has nurtured you all his life ...Rascals! Now ...now I don’t mind calling my father a dog! ... But when he grows old like you, then I’ll say, my revered father, why don’t you sit on the *manji*? Have
your food and enjoy yourself - It’s our duty to look after you! ... but now it's different ... It can't be otherwise ... and how can it be ... when these people are such rascals - Donkeys! (226)

Bishna is taken aback by Maghi’s outbursts and the effect of liquor vanishes. He even thinks Maghi to be a devil to talk like that. The unstoppable Maghi continues saying:

Taya I'm not a drunkard, ... The fact is that I don't know what to do. I don’t like the job of carpenter. You keep sawing, keep chiseling, does that make any sense? I want to do something really big ... something as big as a bomb! ... Tau, there’s nothing much you get out of studies - You know, it's like pulling lice out of your armpits and killing them, that's what it is! ... Whatever I can easily pick up in two months is something our master takes one whole year to teach. So Tau, tell me, do I have a choice but to hit the bottle? ... (226)

In Maghi, Bishna’s anger and disgust echoes multifariously. In the character of Maghi, Gurdial Singh has painted an outright rebel who has set out on his task of purging the society of all its atrocities and inequalities with an undaunted spirit. It is this rebelliousness that we once saw in the young Bishna but that now lies shrouded in his inevitable defeat. The writer’s own disgust with the system and his desire to change it by laying the very fabric of exploitation bare is now made vocal through Maghi after Bishna.

However, as the world is, it always tries to crush down any such sign of opposition to social order, it is the turn of both Bishna and Maghi to be sobered down. Bishna and Maghi’s company the previous night brings serious
repercussions for the two. Where Maghi almost gets himself into a great trouble by beating Gokul Choudhry’s son on his way back to his house the previous night, Bishna has been sent a message through Kala by Kartari to stay away from Maghi. She also asks Kala to tell Bishna that she can no longer look after him, something that Bishna understands without hearing.

With his destroyed calm, Bishna now recalls how his own brother Bhagta too disapproves of him doing odd jobs for people for the fear of losing his reputation. He even remembers how he has been advised by him to file in a petition to claim land in lieu of his lost house in the court, the idea that he abhors. With the feeling of living like a captive in Bhagta’s house, he once again imagines himself to be the prince who stands at the edge of the hill undecided whether to retread back or plunge forward.

In his disoriented frame of mind Bishna ventures out in the pouring rain visiting first his old house, then the bazaar and then Thola’s shop. He finally goes to visit Hetiya. Here he only sees a mud-washed Kothri with slush all around. He opens Hetiya’s canister and is repulsed by the pungent smell of the chemical in the canister that Hetiya had been preparing for years. However Hetiya is nowhere to be found because he died days ago as a passerby tells Bishna. This news leaves him totally shocked.

On returning back in the evening, Maghi the rebel, comes visiting him. He is dead drunk and has done away with his long hair having an English haircut now. He is in a turmoilled state of mind. He says to Bishna, “These people...my father...Thola ... the bania ... I wish I could devour all of them! Devour ... like this ...!(237)

Bishna finds it hard to calm down Maghi’s disturbed mind and to control his intoxicated body. He tries to forced own water through Maghi’s throat while he
frantically resists it. Finally when Maghi lies down exhausted, Bishna pulls out the hidden bottle of liquor to drink it all.

Suddenly, he is taken aback by a knock. But when he opens the door, he finds no one outside. Following the shadow ahead of him he sees it enter Bhagta's workplace where Thola and Bhagta are sitting on the Manja while Kala is standing next to them. Bishna staggers back, grabs a pick axe and storms out again. However, he is overwhelmed by a peculiar sound reverberating in his head and he shouts saying, “Dare you drink the blood of my grandson!” (239). He then falls flat unconsciously on the street he revives for a short while feeling ‘someone’ close to him but dies soon after.

Time passes and after Bishna's death, Bhagta engulfed by an unknown apprehension, tries hard to wipe out all traces of Bishna. Even after three years of his death and two years of Maghi's disappearance, Bhagta feels the two are clinging to him like ghosts. He is unable to walk straight with an upright head and back. He feels exasperated when any of the two are ever mentioned. All he says is : "Why take their names? They have vanished, as if they had never been at all” (242).

Like Gurdial Singh's other novels, the ending of this novel also proclaims hope for all the lone confronters like Bishna through the disappearance of Maghi. It hints at the continuation of the tradition of protestors who will continue to show their resentment against injustice and oppression. Even in his disappearance, Maghi’s presence is very much felt by the reader and by Bhagta. The reader understands Maghi’s disgust with his father’s ways and appreciates his denial is not becoming a part of his system. His objection to unfair means voices the agenda of Bishna’s life-long struggle with the establishment and in a way proposes to continue the fight.

Though the 'survival' of any such rebel may seem bleak but many like Bishna do manage to live life according to their own terms even if they are
forcefully obliterated in the end. They do make their statement before they depart.
By living even as sore thumbs, they proclaim their unwillingness to live suppressed
lives even if they have to suffer innumerable trials and tribulations. Their battle
does not end with the death of fighters like Bhishna because character like Maghi
will continue to bear flag a litter further.
WORK CITED LIST


