CHAPTER-IV
PARSA : REVOLUTIONISM AT ITS BEST

Critics consider the novel *Parsa* as a further development of *The Survivors* and also view its protagonist as juxtaposition to Bishna. The existential worldview put forward in *The Survivors* gains more focus in Parsa. Though both Bishna and Parsa are no heroes in the real sense of word as in social, religious or moral connotations, however they do stand apart as representatives of the ones who dare to differ. But, it is Parsa out of the two who fights his battles successfully on all fronts.

Parsa is a brahmin by caste, a farmer by occupation and a Gurmukh or a Sikh by faith and appearance. Parsa is a rare combination of poetic exuberance and stoic endurance. He is an infamidiable peasant from Bhaiani village of Malwa, truly daring and forbidding when confronted. He hates hypocrisies and pretensions. He feels easy and ecstatic in the presence of a pure human heart. His unique and artistic portrayal by Gurdial Singh blends all these characteristics making him an unforgettable character. His defiance of class and caste barriers and his outrage against observing Brahministic rituals make him stand apart as a rebel.

Parsa is a *karmayogi* who believes in an action oriented life and he adheres to this philosophy all his life. His character has been derived from Parshurama, an avatar of Vishnu and a mythological character who had taken a vow to ruin all *kshatriyas* and bring havoc upon them for having ill-treated his mother. Parsa seems to have inherited certain qualities of Parushurama such as his indomitable spirit, his anger and unparalleled courage. His eventful life journey is a voyage of this indomitable spirit under all odds which furthers his existential struggle with every turn of events in his life. As Dr. J.S. Rahi writes, "He loses at all fronts but never loses the heart. His is a struggle not of the ideal against the evil. It is an existential struggle of the dream against reality" (Tarsem and Sushil 87).

Parsa’s life is a symbolic victory of all those who dare to face the odds with courage and dignity. His personal ordeals and his successful confrontations are
representative of many such sagas. Though a widower at forty, estranged from his two elder sons Jetha and Pohla and having lost his most beloved son Bhanta in a police encounter, Parsa still has the heart to invoke the wrath of his community by fathering a son out of wedlock and remaining firm and unmoved through all trials. Through Parsa, the novel celebrates the indomitable human spirit of all such rebels.

As far as the art of narration is concerned, Gurdial Singh emerges as a master even in Parsa. This novel does not merely depict the incidents in Parsa’s life but portray them in the reality of life. This portrayal brings out various shades of his character during the course of narration. In this novel Gurdial Singh uses the monologue technique to convey Parsa’s hypersensitivity in describing emotional incidents like the deaths of his wife Beero, Basanta his son and Pala Singh Ragi his close friend. Gurdial Singh also uses the stream of consciousness technique to reveal the inner realms of Parsa’s being. The compact narrative revolves around Parsa and never does the story dwindle into sub-plots. Even when Basanta’s encounters are narrated, the story is quickly drawn back to the protagonist’s fate and the digressions are closely linked to Parsa’s destiny.

The narrative is heavily interspersed with poems, songs and shabads which enhance its richness. However, never does these poetic interventions break the continuity of the narrative and the plot. Dr. Jaswinder Singh calls these poetic verses kawishri a type of folk singing. He writes, “The poetic verses and shabads of Gurbani used by Parsa in various circumstances show his attitude to fight social evils/realities. He recites/sings in both sad as well as happy moments” (Tarsem and Sushil 99).

Apart from the effective use of monologue Gurdial Singh’s use of dialogue is also apt and purposeful. He uses meaningful and compact dialogues to convey the feelings of his characters in Parsa. Dialogues are also used to put forth the ideologies of not only the protagonist but also of the other characters. Gurdial Singh’s narrative art is well complemented by the appropriate use of dialogues. However, all is not conveyed through dialogues and monologues. Much that is left
unsaid is conveyed through gestures, facial expressions and body language. Gurdial Singli also uses the art of incorporating tales, myths and poetry into his narration to assert the ideological concerns of his characters and enhance the richness of the text.

Another very subtle technique used by the writer is the use of reactionary comments on situations and events given by minor and major characters both. The criticisms and applauses of the minor characters complement and supplement the concerns of the major characters in Parsa. This artistic presentation of the worldview presents the larger concerns of all the people in his novels. By incorporating such voices, the writer puts forward bigger ideological concerns. The beauty of Parsa lies not only in the portrayal of this larger ideology voiced by the minor characters but in dealing with the inner-ideological concern of fighters and rebels like Parsa. Therefore, Parsa’s saga of survival in the face of all odds is an ideological victory of all those who are non-conformists and dare to context the established but lop-sided societal set-up.

However, the beauty of Gurdial Singh’s art lies not in summing up ideologies but in leaving them open-ended. He does not propose or dispose any particular ideology for he knows well that no particular era can sufficiently analyze any ideology. In this regard Dr. Jaswinder Singh writes:

It is difficult to analyze social circumstances of particular era, as there exist complex and contradictory ideas. They change with time. That is why Gurdial Singh is interested in innermost ideological content of human beings. Neither is there an intimate singular ideology nor any end to ideology. (Tarsem and Sushil 100)

As a result, Parsa emerges as a narrative that rejects any ideology. This novel is also unique in its action-oriented, humane, progressive concern which voices the ideological concerns of all those who are of Parsa’s kind. This novel has an aesthetic narrative which deals with complex human relationships with utmost
care. Even Parsa's obstinacy is dealt in a manner that saves him from falling from his position.

Parsa's battle against capitalism and the prevalent inhuman socio-economic set-up is the battle of every common man who suffers the brunt of a mechanized society devoid of human feelings. This novel can be considered as a challenge against the established but decayed norms which do not value man as valuable entity. Through Parsa, G.S. challenges cultural values, social ethics, moral codes of conduct, religious conforms and spiritual constraints in a fast-emerging emotionless capitalist set-up.

The dilemma that Parsa faces in a society where industrialism is on the rise and where the existing productive methods are becoming extinct is the dilemma of every ordinary man who finds it hard to survive the cut-throat competition in a mechanized society. In such a society Parsa and the others like him have a hard time upholding their personal ideologies and value system. In this regard Dr. S.S. Bhatti writes:

Ideology lurks heavily in people's minds. As a result, even in this dominant capitalistic era, although mass consciousness can loosen the grip of these racial, feudal, owner-slave (culture) system but these can't be eradicated completely.

(Tarsem and Sushil 102)

Parsa's unequal conquest against this capitalistic set-up can be therefore regarded as a desperate battle of many such sufferers. His dynamism and individuality in opposing every cultural onslaught is therefore an ideological victory of every suppressed individual. As Dr. S. S. Bhatti writes: "His idealism is not a drawback but a valuable achievement in Indian social context" (103). His rebellion against the religious system is another ideological victory. To him religion is not about conforming strictly to the rituals and religious practices but as Dr. S.S. Bhatti continues:
To him, religion means ‘deeds of a person’ (Karma). Without ‘Karma’ a person is better for dead. Religion is not an imaginary world or a way to heaven (ladder to heaven) to him. ‘True religion’ is that when a person helps the ‘needy’ and unsheltered persons or protégé self willingly and in accordance with social circumstances” (Tarsem and Sushil 103)

For Parsa, religion is something very personal. To him truth and falsehood are subjective to one’s own selfish concern and level of realization or knowledge. According to him, morality and immorality are divided marginally and cannot be defined. It is again a personal choice depending upon the circumstances that nurture the two. He reaffirms this when he has prohibited sex with a woman named Mukhtiaro which he defends by saying that the only aim of human life is to serve fellow human beings in whatever way one has to or can. He therefore celebrates sex with Mukhtiaro overlooking all social limitations and moral taboos because it satiates Mukhtiaro’s want for companionship and sexual gratification.

It is again due to Parsa’s personal religious belief system that forsakes the duties of a Brahmin and takes up the occupation of a Jat farmer by choice. His willing acceptance of a non-traditional occupation can be contrasted to Sant Narang Dass’ forcible conversion into a sadhu which evokes our sympathy towards such religious people and their mental and spiritual agony. Such people are unable to live life by choice. The traumatic lives of such saints raise valid doubts and queries against the dictates of religion. In addition to their personal agonies, questions also arise about the darkness spread in religious institutions like in the Aashram situated on the banks of the Ganga which has never seen the light of real knowledge. Presenting the crux of religion Parsa says to Manisha Nand, another holy man that all human beings have some obligation regarding a needy, disappointed, helpless or humble person. Without knowing the real meaning of religion a person is ignorant as well as a criminal according to him.

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Parsa lives an ordinary, mundane life on the exterior but he is actually a source of inspiration for even someone like Narang Dass who is an established saint in Haridwar. In Parsa's company, Narang Dass feels that he too stands a chance of true redemption. It is Parsa's patience, depth of understanding and critiquing of society that help him to rationalize his physical indulgence with Mukhtiaro. In this way he is a stalwart figure who opposes established but faulty moral norms and reaffirms ethical living which is actually based on age old divine laws.

Parsa breaks various other social rules and barriers too. He believes in the worth of human enterprise as a duty and not as a compulsion. He fulfils his duty as a father to the best of his capacity and bears all social responsibilities as a single parent with ease. He even puts an end to his blood-relation with his elder sons with ease when they become a part of the 'rat-race' to success and money. He values his relation with his youngest son Basanta and with Tindi, his apprentice, because they are not selfish and pretentious.

His unwavering strength of character based on his own ideology is what impresses the reader. Dr. S. S. Bhatti writes:

Parsa accepts only those human relations which are according to his principles and ideology. 'Falsehood' lies nowhere in his dictionary. He takes very straightforward decision regarding everything, idea, incident, determination or thinking. This thinking makes the 'strength' and force of his character valuable and precious. Instead of looking back he aspires forward and rises high and high in life. (Tarsem and Sushil 104)

The revolutionary spirit of Parsa is embodied in and carried forward by Basanta, who takes to the company of naxalites to find a solution or answer to his problems. His urge for finding a panacea for all hardships, and ordeals in the desire
of the entire helpless and restless class of ordinary peasants who have limited choices but who want to make best use of those that are available. However, as Gurdial Singh shows in this novel, such people do not have enough resources and the much needed political support to turn their individual quests into collective upheavals. As put by Dr. S. S. Rahi:

So, in a nutshell, The novel presents the inevitability of a political alliance between resourceless labour class (represented by Tindi) and small farmer like Basanta at village level for the success of revolution. (105).

The failure of many like Basanta and Tindi is common but Para’s well-meaning personal victory over age-old established norms is not only his individual triumph but is symbolic, for all those who do dare to differ. Parsa’s critical outlook on life makes a beginning towards reversal of the order of power. “For the first time, we realize the unlimited competence (capacity) of human consciousness through the character of Parsa” (105) explains Dr. S.S. Bhatti.

Parsa’s scepticism of societal norms, his humanism, questioning of history, reversal of religious beliefs, counter views on philosophy, establishment of new norms of morality casting doubts on politics and challenging culture are all celebrations of his individual quest and journey towards a realized self. “The message of Parsa is that a man has not taken birth on earth to roll in riches” (Tarsem and Sushil 105).

Parsa’s firm will power and spirit of endurance are the two most important components of his personality that help him to assert his individuality and idealism. This individualism leads to the establishment of his own value system that challenges the age-old norms of culture and society. As Dr. Amar Tarsem puts it “...Gurdial Singh’s novel Parsa is the first fictional attempt to test cultural values on the touchstone of individual value system” (Tarsem and Sushil 107). What is unique about Parsa’s character is his ability to rise above the common people through is revolutionary consciousness and his never give-up temperament.
He does not approve of a defeated life-style of surrender and submission. He believes that those who bow down to oppression and suppression deserve only pity. In this sense, Parsa is truly a revolutionary figure because he upholds certain values for which he is ready to lay down even his life. He ventures out to change others and not to be changed. In this regard as Dr. Amar Tarsem says, “Parsa is manly”. He further writes:

*Parsa* is a saga of the struggle of a person who proves his individuality. On the surface level, the novel looks like the story of a single person while in a way the protagonist represents the whole society. Personal survival is not a problem with him. The problem is how to live with honour in the strayed society and sustain his individuality in the hollowed human relations. (Tarsem and Sushil 108)

Parsa hates the stagnancy in society and its unwillingness to challenge and change the existing traditions and rituals. Through the character of Parsa, Gurdial Singh hits at the prevalent morbid conditions. As rightly put by Dr. Amar Tarsem, “The beauty of the novel lies in the fact that the novel not only makes human beings conscious about their rights but also suggests the ways to achieve them” (108).

In this manner, *Parsa* is a representational novel which speaks for all those who dare to voice out their concerns. He shows how every common man possesses within him a revolutionary, who is capable of changing the society and its norms. Parsa’s inherent power is therefore indicative of the latent power in each ordinary man who if wishes to change his conditions has the capacity to do so. Parsa shows how inspirations from religion, folk lores, idioms and above all ones-self can add to one’s being and by which he or she can become a true idol for others.

Parsa, a Jat-Brahmin hero presents the predicament of the peasant Sikh class on one hand, while on the other he stands firmly against the decadent
practices of Hindu priestly tradition. Therefore, through Parsa, Gurdial Singh voices the concerns of both communities. As written by Darshan Singh Maini in the “Introduction” to Parsa:

His consciousness becomes the ultimate battle ground where the social tensions and conflicts wage their most fierce and acute battle. Parsa seeks to overcome the tyranny of caste and class not through exclusion or rejection, but assimilation and inclusion. His character becomes a site for the resolution of all antinomies, personal and collective. (vii)

The critic also notes how Gurdial Singh’s Marxist thought and “Sikh mysticism” underlines this other novel and “finally attains a rare creative energy and synthesis” (vii) Parsa’s growth from a mundane family man to a realized and liberated soul is slow but a well stipulated.

Parsa’s revolutionary ideas manifest them in multifarious ways. This chapter will examine various aspects of Parsa’s revolutionary temperament through his reactions to various happenings in his life. For this, important incidents from the novel are being analyzed to examine how he asserts his individuality in dealing with them.

Parsa is entirely a protagonist oriented novel. The title itself is indicative of a character dominated plot. In this novel, a third person narrative mode has been used to unfold the story. The struggle of Parsa and his family has been covered in some words pages which begins with Parsa’s father Sarupa having an encounter with some rogues. The beginning sets the tone of an eventful narrative that follows. The virtues of bravery and fair-fighting displayed by Sarupa by protecting himself from his offenders and not attacking his defenseless opponents, resurface again after thirty years in another similar incident in which Parsa defeats his attackers and proves his worth like his father.
The novel that begins with the regular village talks, idleness and ordinariness but gradually develops through an artfully planned narrative, towards meaningful episodes. As D.S. Maini writes:

It’s as though Gurdial Singh needs the weight of smallness and meanness to bring Parsa to a pitch of passionate thought, to rouse him to the full potential of his innate energies, and to level of authenticity where the brave, the true and the elect ultimately arrive. (viii)

Parsa, the romantic poet is never a nostalgic, self-indulgent lesser being. Even in his moments of deep agony. He always emerges as a true gyanī who views the world as a dream and all creation as a drama. Parsa’s love for his dead wife does not ever make him a pitiful desolate husband pining away for his beloved. He nurtures Beero’s memories with silent tears and “His dead wife’s. Luminous image is more as her presence in his consciousness than an aching memory” (ix) writes D.S. Maini.

Parsa’s unusual rebelliousness finds an early manifestation in his reactions to his wife Beero’s death. He reacts calm-mindedly to her passing away and even chides Boby who loudly laments Beero’s death. He tells Taayī Boby, “Just drop this. I won’t allow any such nonsense. Do you understand?”(8). Later when Boby chides Parsa on not putting the dead body of Beero on the ground and letting it lie on the manja. She asks, “How will she attain salvation, cursed by her own Karma” (8). She again suffers Parsa’s wrath who scolds her for uttering non-sense because he does not believe that one who leaves this world on the bed does not attain salvation.

During the funeral procession of Beero, Parsa retains his calm composure joining in with the chorus reciting versus in a charged voice. Showing his revolutionary fervour once again, he retorts sharply to Kashi Ram, the family priest who guides him break an earthen pitcher. Parsa says, “Everything that was hers is
with me, Panditji Maharaj! Nothing has been lost. So this ritual is unnecessary" (10). His stoicism and brave acceptance of loss are note-worthy even in his moment of tragedy. Parsa does not indulge in wailing and crying. Rather he consoles Beero’s brother saying, “Pull yourself together Bhai! Who can challenge his mighty Will? Bhai, we have no choice but to accept it serenely” (10).

Here, it is pertinent to mention that Parsa may seem hard hearted and dry on the exterior through what he says, but the reality is that he had taken care of an ailing Beero for a long time all by himself and none of the relatives had come to help. Now after Beero’s death, Parsa feels disgusted to see their false tears and affection. His hatred for such fake display of concern finds vent in his words as: “Look at them! They think they are the only mourners. For six months when her bones were rattling against the mania no one offered her a drop of water. And now they’ve come to flaunt their affection” (11).

Parsa once again shows his displeasure when Pandit Beli Ram and Kashi Ram discuss about the arrangements to be made for feeding the guests in some other house. Parsa asserts that food would be cooked on their own Chulha and ignoring all social taboos he calls Santu, the barber and his wife, to cook food for all. He does not bother about the social concerns and acceptance of people and lets those go unfed who have their reservations.

He does not waste his energies on stubborn dogmatic rituals. His decision is defended only by Pala Ragi who says:

If we could join the ones who depart-there would be no sorrow left in this world. Suffering is only for those who are left behind. And it’s how we face it-with a smile or a scowl. (11)

Later when Beero’s brother Tirath Ram asks about another ritual regarding burying a bone nearby to avoid people using the dead for Black magic, Parsa gets furious and shuns this practice vehemently. Abhorring the ritual he says, “She
wasn't such a fool, Tirath Ram, that she would rise and walk away either with a nincompoop like you or someone who dabbles in black magic" (14).

As far as Parsa is concerned, he bears the loss with courage even though fond memories of Beero do make him restless at times. Gurdial Singh's use of pathetic fallacy in this novel is used to explain Parsa's frame of mind. He links Parsa's sadness to nature as he writes:

The leaves of the sun-scorched trees appeared wilted. The soft, small leaves of the keekar had turned russet, almost the colour of the soil. The bushes and the shrubs were no better. Sad and droopy, crestfallen, they looked like the curly matted locks of Baba Dharamdas. The cotton plants too, as tall as raised arms, appeared singed. Even the green fence around the fields seemed smoked. (12)

The writer also uses poetry to express Parsa's want of companionship as:

O, my love!
Why don't you come skipping along?
Our days of joy and dancing are few
Come and fulfil the sweet promises of love
O, my love!
Before you leave for another land. (13)

In this novel, the apt use of poetic verses adds to the depth of experience and enriches the reader's emotional domain with noble emotions of Parsa's exalted state, whether in distress or in liberation. This expression can be found in the form of poems and songs throughout the narrative.

The manifestation of Parsa's rebellious temperament finds an early expression in Bhanta in the story just after Beero's untimely death. As Bhanta and Parsa both struggle to come to terms with Beero's permanent departure, Bhanta
expresses how he would become a thanedar. And as he says, “I...I’ll beat up our fasto taaya (15) because as Bhanta tells Parsa, “He was telling elder brother, ‘I’ll usurp your field’s. Who is he? A bloody brother –in-law of the fields? Henh... Henh? Bapu, I” shoot him with a rifle!” (15). Land here once again emerges as a major concern.

Explaining Parsa’s shock on hearing such tough talking by Bhanta Gurdial Singh writes, “Stunned out of his wits, Parsa stared. Never before had he heard any of his sons swear in this manner...” (16). Parsa feels taken aback at Basanta’s daring outburst and calls him his “lion-hearted son” (16) knowing well that Basanta would live up to his name and honour. Such is the beginning of a stronger and stranger relationship between the two.

However, after Biro’s demise Parsa has little time for such subtle emotional indulgences but he never lets responsibilities weigh him down. He buys cattle for his children’s sake inspite of all hassles so that they can be brought up and feed well. Parsa, is no doubt a though loving and devoted father, but is also a harsh disciplinarian. Gurdial Singh writes:

He would jolt them out of slumber in the small hours of the morning, and force them to run as far as the ravine which was some two or three miles away, on the outskirts of the village. Only Basanta, the youngest one was allowed to return, breasting the pond. As soon as they got back, he would force a bowl of boiling hot milk, down their throats. He would make the children drink nearly half the total yield of the three cows, which amounted to fifteen-twenty seers of milk by the night; and the rest he would use for setting curd, to be churned later.(23)

Not only is Parsa’s never temperament a talk of the town, but his non-conformity to social norms also causes people to stay at bay. Nevertheless,
Parsa’s views on life and its duties are revolutionary in nature. He nurtures his own views on ‘faith’ and is willing to fight and die for them. He explains these to Pala Raagiya as:

Raagiya, faith is another name for dharma. And dharma is the other face of Karma. Can you conceive of a man without his Karma? You’re a well-read gyani yourself, a believer who has read the Mahabharata and Gita too. I may be an illiterate fool, but you tell me-am I not right in this respect? (25)

Parsa further illustrates Dharma saying:

To put it straight, Bhai, for me, Dharma means fulfilling the word I gave to Biro. That is, to bring up her children. And if it demands that I give my life, I won’t flinch for the sake of my Dharma. Beyond this, Dharma doesn’t mean a thing to me. If that’s not the right way to think. “This is something that only a man’s inner conscience can decide. I think no granthi or gyani can settle this question. Or can he?” (25)

Parsa continues his struggles and furthers his own subjective karma and dharma as he works his life on his own philosophies. He gets his elder sons Jetha and Pohla admitted to school while Basanta who is too young to go to school is given the duty of taking care of the cattle. Basanta indulges himself in innocent pranks and becomes dearer to Parsa in all respects. Parsa too values him as his offspring and forgives all his remembering his own. He often overlooks the complaints against Basanta dismissing them as trivial. Parsa’s inherent liking for Basanta is described when Gurdial Singh writes:

When Basanta smiled, his teeth, as white as rice, shone. The sparkle in his eyes was more pronounced. The cheeks
(because of the heat, perhaps) had turned flaming red. His height, build, shoulders, hands, feet, even calves resembled Parsa's. His fingers, even his arms were longer than usual. Such a person is destined to become either an emperor or a warrior. How this proverb had suddenly struck Parsa, it was difficult to tell! (29)

The writer develops the story with strengthening of the relationship between the father and son. Soon we find Basanta walking on Parsa's foot-steps in many ways. He even takes to composing couplets, which surprises Parsa. The latter however feels proud about Basanta's creativity. Gurdial Singh also works out a very touching chemistry between Basanta and his bull, Minna. The two love each other and Basanta talks to him very often. Basanta seems much like Minna in his sturdiness and stubbornness.

As time passes, Jetha and Pohla excel at school not only in studies but also in sports. As the two become gloated up with success, Pala tries to put in some wisdom in them saying: There is a lot more that you have to achieve. Don't pride yourself for nothing. You haven't reached the other end of the globe. They say, there are fourteen tabaks in the world. And you haven't taken the round of a single one properly yet. (46)

As Pala tries to drill in same practical sense in his elder son the two become even more conceited and proud. When Parsa learns about scholarships being offered by the government to his elder sons for admission in the sports college at Jallandhar, he becomes agitated. He displays his doubts saying: Oye if, where did such a generous and satyugi sarkar come from? On the one hand, the sarkari officials swindle the people, on the other, this very sarkar goes around, flaunting its generosity (47).

Parsa even tells his sons' headmaster who advocates on their behalf to send them to Jallandhar saying:
Masterji, I'm not the kind to expect my sons to earn respect for me. Those who revel in others glory lose whatever little initiative they have. All of us reap the harvest of our own Karmas. No one depends on another for survival. (47)

With such clashes in world-view and point of view, Pala soon realizes that his elder sons are bent upon ruining the family honour. True to his apprehensions, Parsa is soon confronted by open demands and shameless bitterness from Jetha and Pohla. Parsa feels totally shattered when the two boys crop their hair shattering his faith and religiosity. He wants to confront them and punish them but Parsa remembers an old saying that once a son slips into his father's jutti with case, then he should not be reprimanded.

Parsa is unable to take such a blow on their identities and scolds his sons vehemently. This however leads to an eye-opener for Parsa himself. He realizes that his elder sons have gone out of his control and Parsa says:

Now I get it. It's all right then. You'd better listen to me as well. I never had any expectations of you in the past nor do I have any now. You also don't need us any more, it appears. I had to do my duty and that I have. Now you have become real 'fliers'. So you can soar wherever you wish to. You're not animals that I'll have you caged. But remember, This is a world, not a paradise where devtas reside. Tuck this piece of wisdom in your hem. You'll have to act like men if you wish to survive, no matter where you go Hwalayat or elsewhere.(49)

Through the conflict between Parsa and his elder son's, Gurdial Singh lays bare the age-old confrontation between glorious past traditions and contemporary deterioration in values. Parsa, stands as a protector of the former and is totally
disillusioned by Jetha and Pohla’s behaviour. He hates their hypocrisies and finally he breaks all relations with them.

Parsa also feels disgusted with the inhuman educational at set up that produces ungrateful and irresponsible students as his elders sons. His abhorrence of such superficial education is manifested in the burning of Jetha and Pohla’s books. He believes that the education system should produce better individuals and that it has failed in its duties. His worry is that and in instead this faulty system produces only better workers and shallow literates. He says, “Raagiya, I’m burning all junk and falsehood” (54). He also says “The entire blame lies with this education which have made beasts not Gods of human beings”. (55)

Basanta also lashes out on his elder brothers’ callousness when he says:

Bhai the reality is that now you don’t need us anymore. We’re still jat-boot, but you’ve become true collegiate-Jalandhariye. How can our opinions match now? When a sandpiper goes to join the swans, she refuses to cast a glance towards her own kind. All black creatures appear revolting to her. It’s only when the swans refuse to entertain her that she is non-plussed. By that time it’s already too late. Tyrannized by time, all a bee can do is drone. Do you understand, Bhai Singha? (50)

However, Basanta’s words of wisdom fall on envious ears. The two brothers show no signs of repentance and leave for Jalandhar. This comes as a deep blow to Parsa and he tells Pala raagi that he would never depend on them and their money in future. He even snubs Pala for defending Jetha and Pohla’s decision to get their hair cut because they are pandits and not gursikhs. Parsa speaks almost reproaching the ragi by saying:
Bhaiji, this has nothing to do with any religion, Hindu, Sikh or Muslim. It’s a question of one’s inner strength or weakness. These sons of mine have a mind as slippery as water in a sieve. If they can’t even preserve the hair I’d nurtured with such care, conditioning them with butter and butter milk, how can they be expected to earn respect? And even if they do, this respect earned by these frivolous sons of mine will be no more than a stigma on my name, raagiya. Besides, why should I be dependent on them for building my reputation?(51)

Life moves on and as Jetha and Pohla strive for success, Parsa and Basanta develop more intimacy with each other. When they receive a letter from the two estranges brothers Parsa gets infuriated, tears it into pieces and hurls the pieces into the chulha, as a sign of breaking all ties with them.

The father and son, suffer another blow when Basanta’s would-be in-laws break their daughter’s engagement with him Parsa also learns that she is to be married elsewhere. His self respect and family honour, is now again at stake and, “Parsa felt as if someone had struck him with a hammer right below his chest. Sides of his feet were burning as was his forehead” (59). Both Parsa and Basanta think alike about protecting family honour and Parsa feels relieved after getting Basanta’s reassurance that matters would be settled soon.

This temporary relief leads to further complications with Basanta’s altered temperament. He becomes inexplicably serious and also somewhat secretive, something which disturbs Parsa greatly. Actually, it is Basanta’s inability to assert himself that is eating up his insides. Basanta feels totally helpless in settling his affairs as he passionately seeks to establish his identity to make his presence felt in society. Here, the father and son’s personal ordeals in dealing with the society and their grappling with the idea of identity has larger implications. The writer wishes to establish the quest for many such assertions in a lop-sided society through the
tests faced by Parsa and Basanta. He also aims at voicing out the concerns of many such helpless people as Tulhi, a character in Parsa, who too wishes to be different but lacks the courage to do so. His talk with Basanta shows how people like him waste their lives away. He tells Basanta:

Basantiya *puttar*! This illusion of being ‘different’ is really a painful one! Your *bapu* has been through the rut. Now you’ve also started playing the same game. It’s really not a good idea to scorch your fingers. I just squandered’ my life away, Basantiya-just like that!... Don’t they say, every moment, each day and night, time is running out ... Now very little left. That too shall pass somehow. (70).

Tulhi also talks of his own troubles and his sorry take at life but commends Parsa by saying:

Basantiya, your *bapu* is really the son of a brave man! When he was a free soul, he really was one. And when he became a family man, he became an out and out family man. When he stopped working, it was as if he had hung his *jutti* ... And now when he has resumed it, his capacity to work has literally sent ripples through the village.(71)

Tulhi’s words of admiration for Parsa show how the latter has always risen up to the expectations and tests of time. He emerges a victor each time. This reiterates the fact that Parsa stands tall as a survivor and fighter in the eyes of all those who have not been able to assert themselves in an outwardly defiant and daring manner. He therefore emerges as Gurdial Singh’s representational rebel.

Walking on Parsa’s footsteps, Basanta also takes to rebelliousness but of a different kind. He gets Tulhi to make a pistol for him after the promise that he would not use it “against a poor or an innocent man” (74). Basanta soon takes to
the company of naxalites and this association leads to his estrangement from Parsa. Now, they rarely talk to each other and Parsa has only Pala as a companion to whom he talks about various issues related to dharma, sin, virtue, devotion, truth and falsehood. But the raagi’s exposition often leaves Parsa dissatisfied. It is Parsa’s wisdom that often supersedes Pala’s dogmatic beliefs. Here too, Parsa emerges as a successful know-all.

When the two are left alone after Basanta’s abrupt departure, Pala often urges Parsa to curb Basanta’s activities. He fears that Basanta may land up killing someone. To this Parsa replies in his characteristic manner:

What is so unusual about it? His ancestors have been doing such things all along—and if he does something, he’ll simply be keeping up the family tradition. Raagiya, there is hardly anything weird about it? (92)

On being questioned by Pala: “Won’t the veil of this tradition ever be shredded into pieces by any generation? Will it continue to trudge, century after century, along the same beaten track?”(92), Pala replies:

Why shouldn’t one tear the veil? One who has the blood of his ancestors in his veins, you think, can ever take it lying down? How can such a person go into hiding, cover his face with a khes and go off to sleep inside? Especially when he has been beaten. Raagiya, it is much better to tear off the veil than endure the shame of being a coward?—Tell me honestly, am I not right? (92)

This conversation between Parsa and Pala aptly sums up the concerns of this novel regarding preservation of honour and self-assertion. Parsa values Basanta’s endeavour to make his presence felt even though the way that he has chosen to do so may not be totally acceptable to him. Nevertheless, Parsa feels assured that Basanta is man enough to settle his matters on his own. He silences
Pala’s fears regarding the FIR against Basanta for assaulting this former fiancée’s future husband’s Kishan Chand, by saying, “So what? They can’t hang him, ... And even if they do, it doesn’t matter. Only the sons of brave mothers are hanged. Have you ever heard of a eunuch being hanged?”(93). Such is his passion for honour and manhood.

Their discussion furthers with some reflective and deeply philosophical talk by Parsa which is directed against Pala’s worry regarding Basanta. Parsa tells Pala, “Raagiya, if you with all your knowledge have not been able to cast off this knowledge of attachment-what will be our fate, the hellish creatures that we are!”(93). In these lines, it is our worldly-wise Parsa that impresses the reader with his deep thought and mature ideas that leads man to accept every situation even-mindedly. This is also what places Parsa on a higher pedestal as compared to the other protagonists of Gurdial Singh’s earlier novels. Parsa’s words impress Pala greatly and they silence his apprehensions and doubts. Gurdial Singh writes:

Removing his spectacles, Pala opened his eyes and looked straight into Parsa’s eyes. Whatever he said was crystal clear, and there was no room for any suspicion either. Had he grabbed an opportunity for a change of heart, he could become a robber as well. Or a sadhu too, renouncing everything. Every kind of potential was probably latent in him. Pala liked him precisely for these qualities which he lacked himself. Though sometimes he wished that parsā had a reputation in the village different from the one he had come to enjoy. He wanted Parsa should not be feared so much as respected or honoured. (93)

However, things have never been and its seems will never be so smooth for Parsa who it appears is destined to suffer the blows of fate. Soon the police come looking for Basanta who admits to Parsa about assaulting Kishan Chand and chopping off his arm. The two talk about saving Basanta but it is Parsa’s inevitable
worry that makes him fear for Basanta. Gurdial Singh writes: "In his heart he knew that it was attachment to Basanta that was the cause of his fear. And this attachment he couldn't renounce" (100).

These lines offer a juxtaposition to the earlier lines in the text, where Parsa instructs Parsa about non-attachment. These lines also lend a human touch to Parsa's character where an ordinary person actually fails to practice what he preaches because of the acute circumstances and emotional. The writer here wishes to portray Parsa in all authenticity as a common man with some extra-ordinary qualities but also with some ordinary human flaws so that he seems more convincing and real.

As an assertion of this, the following lines spoken by Parsa re-affirm Gurdial Singh's creation of Parsa not as a super-hero but as daring common man who lives a mundane life of an ordinary man. Inspite of being a hard core fighter, he also has his weak moments where he fails to contest blatantly and seems to reconcile with destiny. He says to the havaldar who has come to look for Basanta and who sarcastically questions Basanta's misdeed that:

Kaka, in our family the great grand-children pay for the sins of their seven generations. Bhai, aren't we all trapped in the chakravayuh of our ancestor's temper and family pride? Whosoever is born in this world, can't escape the noose till he finally dies. Such are the things that our wise men, and even granths harp on all the time. This is a cycle of 'eighty-four' lives of the soul. It doesn't stop anywhere. (101)

However, Parsa soon resumes his fierceness and even the police official who has come to arrest Basanta marvels at his outright defiance regarding law, its makers and the implementers. Gurdial Singh expresses the havaldar's admiration for Parsa as: "For the first time he had encountered a man who didn't fear the
police or the law in the least. Neither did he show any signs of remorse over his son’s irrational and unmotivated act of attempt to murder” (10). It is this blatant contesting of authority and blind support of any act of bravery for honour that makes Parsa a hero in the eyes of the reader. And, it is due to such qualities that this study celebrates him as a 'representative of the unrepresented'.

After Basanta’s imprisonment, Parsa not only suffers emotional trauma, but also bears the brunt of total castration from society. It is in such times of distress that Parsa emerges as a deeply philosophical and mature person, who accepts all trivialities with sublimity as is evident from the following poem that he often repeats:

Know, O’ my soul, know!
Why wander from door to door
Know thy real essence!
my soul ...  
Who’s the friend and who, the foe
Accept one and all as your own!
my soul ...
When your heart is not on your side
How does it matter where you abide
my soul ... (106)

In this poem, Parsa’s deep understanding of the mystery of the purpose of creation is described poignantly. Parsa talks about a human’s ultimate goal which is to realize who he really is and where he has come from. He also ponders on why attachment is so blinding when life is so short-lived and if all people great or small, must end in dust. He also ponders upon how this life really become significant? These questions seem to continue the writer’s own existential quest furthering it from The Last Flicker to this novel. This search has become deeper with time and has also ripened from mere complaints of Jagseer to soulful attempts at self-realization of Parsa. In this way too, Parsa as a novel emerges more strongly that the previous ones.
However, life carries on in all refinement and in all trivialness. So does Parsa's who realizes well that change is the law of nature. But he does not like the way life has turned out for him. He vehemently disapproves of the proposal of allowing Gangi, Basanta's former finance to come to their house as a daughter-in-law. Parsa considers this as a blot on his self-respect and family honour. He gives vent to his feelings while speaking to Minna the bull, saying:

Now look at this, son! ... What kind of weird things are happening ever since your brother Basanta left. People bring their own good fortune, Minnia, Doesn't, matter- the time will never remain the same. Nothing ever does. Everything is in a flux. (109)

So pure is the relationship between Parsa and Minna that the two need no language to build bridges between them. It is the language of emotion that the two speak and understand. To explain their sublime association Gurdial Singh, writes after Parsa has spoken the above lines that:

Minna bellowed lustily this time. So deep was the sound that it seeped inside Parsa and purged him from within. A heavy weight dropped away from his chest. Everything about him bathed in a new freshness, almost like his face reflected in a pool of crystal clear water. And humming all to himself, he started off towards the water-channel that led to the cotton fields. (109)

Continuing in the same elated mood, Parsa slowly soars above the ordinariness of life, shuns the mundane and reaches the ecstatic heights where, as Gurdial Singh writes, "His soul blossomed like a lotus flower. Why? ... who knows! Wasn't this the very mystery that had eluded Parsa's grasp all through life? It was difficult to fathom one's own essence; for even if one knows it, still one didn't (110).
What strikes the readers here is Parsa’s ability to rise to such ethereal heights in spite of so many problems and imperfections in his life. In such moments of elation, Parsa even supersedes Pala who is a renowned raagi and an established man of knowledge. He tells Pala when the latter is ill that:

O raagiya, you shouldn’t lose heart so easily. These ups and downs are always there. Happiness and pain are inseparable. They are like Siamese twins. And come to think of it, there’s hardly any difference between the two; neither in their appearance nor in height or build. Sometimes one turns its face towards us, at times the other. Whichever way you look, they always stand facing us. (112)

Parsa also speaks out his own stoic endurance of life. He talks about the predicaments of all sufferers and survivors like him when he tells Pala:

Besides, you shouldn’t worry about us. Ours is a hide, as tough as a buffalo’s. So these minor sorrows don’t even leave any trace behind. Unless someone decides to strike the ankles with a gandasa, we are not the kind to bother. That too, because the fool may suddenly turn it and batter the neck with it ... I suppose, one thinks like that only because of the lust for life-otherwise, why should anyone worry about one’s neck. Guru Sahib says, ‘Whosoever wishes to play this game of love should walk into my street, his head upon his palms.’ Why should one be so attached to life? It’s perhaps some kind of greed. (112)

This episode offers a long and deeply philosophical interaction between Parsa and Pala in which the reader realizes that Parsa’s wisdom is much more deeper though he is a man of the world unlike Pala the renunciant. It seems that it
is actually Pala who is under the trauma of life and its eccentricities than Parsa, who is the actual victim of life. However, Parsa seems to have learnt the trick of passing life with equanimity of feelings and balance of emotions.

This is the reason that when Pohla comes home as a successful man in society’s eyes, Parsa does not bother much. He has never forgotten the hurt and shame that his elder sons inflicted on him by cropping of their hair without any concern for their faith and prestige. He tells Pohla:

If you could grow your beard just to indulge yourself or some such reason, why wouldn’t you become an _amritdhari Singh_ to please me. What hurts me is that the first time you got your milk-butter conditioned hair chopped just because others were doing so. You have grown them now for much the same reason. This is what I call herd-mentality. God has given man the power to think and decide for himself. After all, men are not a flock of sheep, Pohla Singha? (118-119)

These words of deep wisdom however have no impact Pohla. Parsa knows Pohla inside-out also knows well that for his son the question of honour and identity is subsidiary to success and fame. Shares in feelings with Minna once again:

Well done ! This sound is enough to rejuvenate a man like me, O my lion! ... And when we grow old, we’ll live together. It’s a curse to be old! Neither you nor I will be able to cope with it ourselves, I warn you! We should leave this world while we’re still bellowing. Isn’t it right?"

Disillusioned thus with his elder sons and unable to enjoy the company of Basanta, Parsa nurtures Tindi an outcaste, as his own son. He loves him and cares for him. He also teaches Tindi the acceptable ways of social life and healthy ways
to life. Tindi respects Parsa as his benefactor and mentor and he reciprocates Parsa’s concern for him.

Later, Parsa pays a visit to Basanta’s house where he finds that despite of extremely adverse circumstances and living conditions, Basanta, who is a fighter like his father, has managed to keep his spirits high. Explaining the conditions in the prison Basanta displays his survival instinct when he says:

Bapu, we’re really enjoying here, ... No worry about roti-paani, or clothes etcetera. All of us here are actually wolves in sheep’s clothing. It’s an odd assortment, wood drawn from different forests. Most of the time we sing hymns, praising the Gurus. I’m beginning to realize now that there’s nothing to beat this place. It’s simply exotic! (127).

It is here that Basanta comes in contact with the naxalites some modalities. He is totally convinced by their revolutionary ideas and is also impressed by their education. It is through them that Basanta becomes aware of the ways of the society and how its functions. Parsa is apprehensive of the danger behind Basanta’s association with such men that and he tells Basanta that such people are termed dangerous by the police. To this Basanta replies:

That’s how they know what the police is. They’re the ones who enlightened me that the police are more like puppets, eager to dance to the tune of those in power. Whoever takes up for the poor becomes their ‘natural enemy’-because he will in all likelihood speak against the government too. Why would the police state that such people are ‘trustworthy’...? Does anyone hold a good opinion of an ‘enemy’? (129)
Parsa is quick enough to sense the change is Basanta and he leaves the prison with a suspicion about his safety. However Parsa returns back to his *karmabhoomi* where he knows he has a definite role to play and that which is necessary. However, he dismisses all futile human endeavours to fame and ‘bubble reputation’. He tells Jetha who comes home to visit his father:

*Kaka*, one should never be so arrogant! Arrogance always has to lick dust. Don’t you know the kind of fate the proud Hirnauakashyap, Duryodhana and Ravana had to meet ultimately? And what can you bring for anyone! You just look after yourself. That’s more than enough. (136)

Parsa even turns down any kind of help that Pohla offers being a police-official. Parsa is deeply cynical and critical of the government and its prejudiced policies. He tells Pohla, who talks of his legal claim that: so but you know that if I haven’t acknowledged your government as a government all my life why would I how before its law?” (141). When Pohla alleges Parsa of giving an impression that by looking after his sons well Parsa has done a favour to them, he says:

In this world no one favours anyone. We all do our duty-some happily, others grudgingly. We all just do our *karmas*-some good, others bad. Some regard bad *karmas* as good, while others treat good ones bad. And I, too, would say as much as my brains permit me. (141)

When the discussion heats up and Pohla speaks against Basanta, Parsa refuses to hear anything against the latter. He ends his long speech in favour of Basanta by saying, “All you need to remember is that it’s beyond our control and we’re made of a different mettle. And this difference between us shall always remain” (142). This establishes Parsa’s close affinity with Basanta because the two bond with each other unlike with others.
It is due to this inexplicable “mettle” that Tindi fails to understand Parsa and he appears to him like enigma. Gurdial Singh writes:

Sometimes he appeared more like a giant to him and at a times, man like other men. Occasionally he appeared to be a raagi or a poet and sometimes an invigorant Jat. What was, indeed, amazing was that neither Parsa nor his sons had ever seemed to be Brahmins. (148)

In spite of all such contradictions and amalgamation, Parsa impresses the reader with his authenticity and sincerity of character. His devotion towards duty and his truthfulness towards relationships are once again displayed at the death of Pala raagi, whom he remembers fondly after he dies at his house, on his own manja. Recalling how Pala had come visiting him the previous night, Parsa relates with affection the nobility that they shared. He says;

He was really a lucky man. He left just the way sadhu-sants do. Almost as if he had come to sanctify this place ! He had come to bless us, this house and the fields. Even in his last moments Pala honoured his vow of friendship ... He deserves hundred namaskars! Hundred namaskars."(155).

Parsa continues to challenges societal taboos and he does not bother about the bad omens proclaimed by many about Pala’s death at Parsa’s house. He does not even denounce the bed on which his beloved friend breathed his last. As Dr Amar Tarsem writes: “He considers it the last memorial to his friend” (Tarsem & Sushil 109). Just like after Beero’s death, Parsa once again stands firmly against observing the dogmatic rituals of Pala’s last rites.

After the demise of Pala, Parsa suffers other rude blows, the just being Minna’s death. Both Parsa and Basanta, who has first returned from prison are totally gloomy at Minna’s death and Laloo taaya attributes his death to Parsa’s departure to Haridwar. He explain the loneliness of Minna by saying:
Who says animals don’t have life in them. If you ask me, he died because of separation. If your bapu hadn’t gone, he probably would not have died, not the way he did. It’s sheer worry that consumed him! Hanh! This is what it is Kaka. Some animals are wiser than human beings too. The only thing is that they can’t express themselves in words. Hanh, this is it?… (164)

Parsa’s second visit to Haridwar brings varied experiences for him. This visit comes as an eye-opener for Parsa who goes to Haridwar in an attempt to enrich his knowledge and revitalize his spiritual fervour. But he painfully realizes; “How much ignorance is there in this world! The place where he expected to attain the ultimate ‘torch of knowledge,’ nothing could be found, not a thing as he went around, groping. How bizzare!” (183).

Among other disillusionments, Parsa realizes how even the established saints like Narang Das, has not been able to attain the light of real enlightenment. On the contrary, it is Narang Das who admires Parsa’s calmness and equanimity he aspires to gain at least what Parsa has attained. Parsa is even sought by Narang Das to satisfy his queries and worries about the world from which he has apparently broken all ties. In this way too, Parsa established himself as an exemplary stalwart figure. He emerges as a true ascetic in spite of being a family man. He follows what Pala had said, “Never send a seeker back, empty-handed. It’s grave sin” (189).

Parsa’s second visit to Haridwar is also significant in his meeting with Mukhtiaro with whom he establishes a strange but ethereal relationship-one that is based on goodness and kindness. Parsa’s evolutionism once again manifests itself in this association too when he has sex with her under compulsion from Mukhtiaro’s side. This is not a fulfillment of his own lust, but a means to satisfy and quench Mukhtiaro’s physical thirst. Para also has no hassles in having sex with her at Haridwar-one of the most sacred places of Hindus. The act may be
considered taboo by many but for Parsa it was a result of urgency of circumstances. His indulgence with Mukhtiaro though sexual in nature, never crosses the boundaries of sacredness because never after this incident stoop to the level of an illicit affair. This maiden physical association gives Mukhtiaro the much needed satisfaction and she finds here if in a state of perfect bliss or ananda.

Parsa’s yatra to Haridwar in the novel shows how Parsa is very much a man of the world, aware and awake, yet detached and spiritually evolved. It is not only his journey to a holy place, but his own yatra to the inner realms of his own being. He feels internally drawn toward the Ganga and his exhilaration finds expression in his ecstatic poetic verses. His experiences during the visit to Haridwar are mystical in nature. They rejuvenate and revive him from the existential gloom that had been binding him down. His entire being springs back into active life and he becomes once again like the free “Agni bird” (186) who rooms fearlessly across the skies occasionally returning to the earth to perform its desired duties. In this regard D.S Maini writes in the “Introduction” in this novel: “He is not the ethics of evasion or warn-out dogmas, but a confluence of Karma and Dharma of action and thought slowly ripening into a personal vision”(ix).

This personal vision encompasses his personal maturity and nobility too which is manifested best in his relations with Tindi. He once again challenges the societal taboos of caste system through his association with Tindi. A Brahmin by caste, Parsa does not mind eating food made by Tindi. On returning from his second visit to Haridwar, when Tindi shows his amusement and hesitation on being ordered by Parsa to light the chulha, Parsa says:

Me ... me, why are you bleating like a lamb? You first do what I’ve asked you to. Understand? I’m the one who has come from ‘Hardwar’-a passageway to all dharma-karma. I know better than you do what dharma-karma is. From today, you will cook for me as well. Do you get it? Get up now. (199)
After this episode there is a long discussion on power, the ways of the powerful and the helplessness of the powerless. Though this discussion does not further the plot or story line in anyway, it does serve the purpose of writing this text which deals with hegemonic relationships. Politics, issue of inequality, caste-differences, governmental set-up stand of revolutionaries, hidden desires of the underdogs and the much needed reversal of power-game are all discussed here. What comes out pertinently in this discourse is Parsa’s stubborn stand that the people will never be able to comprehend and support. One of them says:

Now you look at the family of baba Parsa. Even if someone’s son is appointed a peon in the tehsil, he doesn’t mind borrowing other people’s ornaments to proclaim himself a sardar. But look at him. One of his sons is a thanedar and the younger one is in Waleit. He must be making a tidy sum in dollars. But he doesn’t even allow both of them to cross the threshold. And the third one who stays with him, got into such a scrape that he ended up in jail. Now they say, he’s knocking around with the naxalites. But baba Parsa has a good opinion of him. Family secrets can never be fathomed. (205)

It is this very stubbornness and irrationalism in the society’s view that the author celebrates in this text. An open display of Parsa’s disgust with the dogmas and malpractices of society once again foregrounds itself when Tindi talks about his mother’s wish that Tindi should pour gangajal into his dying father’s mouth. To this Parsa says:

Oh, you shouldn’t even mention such things at this point … Not that gangajal helps in anyway; it’s simply an illusion, a way of consoling oneself. For someone who hasn’t had butter-milk to his heart’s content all his life, how can you
ensure he gets a place in heaven simply by pouring pure ghee and panj-ratni into his mouth in his last moments. It’s all a fraud … If this could lead to salvation, won’t it put an end to the whole bloody business of dharma and karma or sin and virtue. For the likes of us, the illiterate jats, this is the only world we know … it’s the other world too, where all we seek is enough to feed ourselves. And this is what the stupid brahmins keep referring to as the land of dreams. (207)

Parsa’s hatred of hypocrisy in society and the falseness of its people is quite evident in this speech. It is Parsa’s wisdom and humanitarianism that voices itself in these words. He is an advocate of equality for all. He feels sorry at poor Tindi’s naivety on believing the dubious ones who have been visiting his house into believing in far-fetched promises of equal sharing by redistribution of land. Tindi’s words make Parsa uneasy and he worries about Basanta.

Soon, Parsa’s apprehensions face up when Basanta comes home rather secretly at night. After a short discussion he broaches up the topic of his family’s oddness, one whose actions are rather uncelebrated and unpredictable ones. On being asked by Parsa about his whereabouts Basanta answers:

Does anyone ever plan and go anywhere … and as for our family, everything is so special. Did Pohla ever think of becoming a thanedar or did Jetha plan his trip to England? On an impulse you left for Hardwar. As if you had gone there to do tapasaya! You thought of it, so you picked up your shawl and set off. No wonder people think ours is a crazy family. If we, too had deliberated over our actions, wouldn’t we have become ‘sardars’ the way Dyal Chand Pandit from Ugo village did. Besides, everyone would have applauded us for our wisdom. (211).
Basanta not only seems to know his roots well but also seems realize his family's distinctiveness. He is strangely proud and annoyed of all its eccentricities at the same time. He also talks passionately about Gangi and the ill-treatment that she was meted out with by her brother because of Bhanta.

Later, Parsa pays a visit to Mukhtiaro where the two exchange some reassurances of love and devotion. However, a victim of rude fate that Parsa is, he suffers another blow in the form of Basanta’s death, which Parsa considers no less than martyrdom. He feels that his son has sacrificed his life for equality of rights and assertion of his individuality, both that are of great value in Parsa’s eyes.

Parsa’s challenge of Brahministic rituals is once again at open display when Parsa performs Basanta’s last rites and his cremation in his own fields. Gurdial Singh writes:

This time too, Parsa had not allowed anyone to wail in grief. The women of the family sat on the kucha track, but none was allowed to break into the ritualistic lament. A few old women kept sniffling though, discussing this gloomy house in soft murmurs. Some did grumble as well but no one dared raise her voice. (235)

Hazooora also tells Parsa, about his own loss:

Hanh! He too was killed in a police encounter, much in the same manner, by these messengers of Yama. It’s been six months now. He was the same age as your kaka. He was running twenty-six … the last year, in the month of October … I have not built any memorial to him … Nor will I ever!” (239)

He further justifies himself saying:
These that’re etched in colours shall perish. The ones engraved in stones shall perish. But the fiery words that the burning hands inscribe in the air, shall remain fragrant forever, forever, forever! (231)

Hazoorah here emerges a hero in all his ordinariness of profession and circumstances, much like Gurdial Singh’s ‘representatives of the unrepresented’.

Parsa also refuses to allow anyone to collect Basanta’s ashes. He immerses them in a nearby distributary’s and does not perform a single ritual. Parsa even arranges for an Akhand Path the very next day. He defies all the objection of the biradari and does not inform any of his relatives. Some people do come to the path but they too stay away from Parsa. They fear his scornful temperament and nonchalant attitude.

Though Parsa abstains from any dogmatic ritualism after Basanta’s demise, it is intriguing to note that he does stand a representative of all ordinary folk with certain special qualities and a few shortcomings or weaknesses. An example of Parsa’s weak indulgence in such flaws in his desire to erect a memorial in memory of Basanta as a mark of his sacrifice, to which the workman Hazoorah reacts wisely saying that there seems no need of a memorial for one who makes an exalted sacrifices. According to him, his deeds in themself establish memorials in the minds of people. Actually Hazoorah’s own son was killed as Basanta. He tells Parsa: “He was real son of a man! … Bhagat Singh, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Udham Singh!” (239).

Parsa’s existential search deepens with the passage of time. He often contests and question the ways of God and his purpose behind sending “mean persons to this world”? (253). His deep philosophy and wisdom gained by experience can be seen in his dealings with other characters in the novel. However, his spirits stand unmellowed and so does his self-respect. He dislikes any show of weakness and self-pity as in the case of Gheechar whom Parsa chides by saying:
One thing you must remember that the people who claim, 'A mother offers a morsel only when she hears a cry' are not men, merely overgrown children. Men know how to claim their share forcibly and they do it, come what may. Have you ever seen anyone offloading sackful of grain in the house of one wallowing in sorrow? ... This world only understands one language and that is the language of the jutti. If you have a staff in your hand, the entire village will be in awe of you. And with an empty bowl in your hand, even if you were to go looking for dogs, they'll come charging at you with the ferocity of lions, snarling, threatening to flay the skin off your ankles. (267).

It is this forceful claim on life and his share of happiness that even after the death of his beloved son Basanta, Parsa's vigor never dwindles and he refuses to surrender to fate and circumstances. He becomes rather more aware of how the state and government can operate its oppressive power to dehumanize people. He also realizes how power and authority become synonyms for exploitation and suppression and join hands to kill the spirits of many like Basanta. He also evaluates how politics at any level can shatter any and all individual endeavours to challenge it. But, Parsa himself refuses to submit to any such oppression and this forms the core of this novel.

Parsa stands liberated by choice and will. Parsa's new start and take at life with Savitri, a maid, and his child from Mukhtiar is symbolic of his never-give-up attitude. It also signifies his unwillingness to submit to a life of nothingness. He is also not bothered about the opinion of people regarding nurturing a new family. D.S. Maini points in this regard in his "Introduction" to Parsa that, "The loud-mouth, the rumour mongers and the stupidly inquisitive of the village know one thing for sure. Parsa, they know, is Parsa, is Parsa, and would not be crossed in any way". (x)
However, Parsa’s life after this is left to the speculation of the readers. Many who understand Parsa well realize that the fighter-survivor will not stoop to authority and injustice. Also, the richness of his spiritualism will increase forever. He will continue living life with stoicism defiance and courage. The source being his influx of soul energy that is inexhaustible and indestructible.
WORK CITED LIST


