Chapter V

*Parsa: An Expression of Stoicism*

*Parsa*, published in 1991, is Gurdial Singh’s very famous novel. It is the only novel of Gurdial Singh which has been entitled after the name of its protagonist i.e. Parsa. Gurdial Singh generally assigns suggestive or symbolic titles to his novels and in this manner *Parsa* is not an exception. The title *Parsa* has been derived from a mythic figure Parshurama, the sixth incarnation of God Vishnu, who was famous for his valour, physical strength, determination and warrior skills. While going through the discourse, we observe that Parsa too possesses these qualities (which have been described in detail latter in this chapter) in his personality.

Gurdial Singh selects, like in his other novels too, the life of peasantry in the rural Punjab as the background of this novel. Parsa, the protagonist of the novel, is a very brave and physically strong man like his father Sarupa and for this reason, the people of the village feel fear from and great regard for their family. He, despite being a *brahmin* by birth, is a peasant by profession and thus is known as a *jat-brahmin* in the discourse. His wife Biro dies due to some illness, leaving behind three sons named Jetha, Pohla and Basanta. Parsa considers it his responsibility to bring his children up according to the wish of his wife. He makes them to have hard physical exercises and provides them with good diet. He buys two milch cows to feed his children in a better way. Out of them, one cow gives birth to a beautiful calf and Parsa names it Meena. Two of Parsa’s sons are interested in studies and games and after completing their matriculation, they take admission in Sports College, Jalandhar to continue with their games and studies. In spite of Parsa’s concern, Basanta, his youngest son, does not show any interest in school. Parsa does not compel him to study and allows him to do farming with him in their fields. While working in their fields together, Parsa and Basanta develop a strong emotional attachment with Meena, who has now become an immensely strong bull like his masters. Basanta grows up to become quite like his

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62 Brahmins, the upper class Hindus, are not generally found to be attached with agriculture in the Punjab.
father and acquires all the traits of his lineage. Jetha and Pohla, on the other hand, do well in their sports career.

Basanta, in his early youth, comes to know that his fiancée has been engaged to another person (Master Kishan Chand) because her parents think that their son-in-law should be in some government job rather than be a farmer. Basanta first gives warning to Master Kishan Chand that he should not come between him and his fiancée but when it does not work out he attacks him violently and surrenders to the police. Parsa leaves his house in the village and starts living in his fields along with the bull Meena who has now become a soul-companion to him.

Parsa’s elder son Jetha moves to England and gets married there. He sends some gifts for Parsa but he does not accept them. Pohla becomes a chota thanedar\(^{63}\) in Punjab Police and marries his senior DSP’s daughter. He often comes to meet his father Parsa but he (Parsa) does not like his newly acquired etiquettes of city-life. He has by now decided to break all the relations with both of his elder sons. In jail, Basanta meets some activists of Naxalite Movement and gets attracted by their ideas.

Parsa’s best friend Pala dies in his fields one day before Basanta returns from the prison after completing his sentence. Parsa goes to Haridwar\(^{64}\) leaving behind the responsibility of the fields to his son Basanta and his farm-hand Tindi. In the absence of Parsa, Meena falls sick yearning for him. Basanta tries his level best to get him cured but after some time, he dies. The active members of Naxalite movement often start coming to meet Basanta in his fields and make him the member of their party. In Haridwar, Sant Narang Das, the head of a dera\(^{65}\), gets influenced by the behaviour and the philosophy of life of Parsa. In the dera, Parsa meets Mukhtiar Kaur whose husband has died. On her request, he develops physical and spiritual relations with her.

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\(^{63}\) Sub-inspector

\(^{64}\) A religious place for Hindus situated on the banks of the river the Ganges. To the Hindus the Ganges is a holy river, and many Hindus go to the river as pilgrims and wash themselves in it. The word “Haridwar” is derived from two words “hari” which means God and “dwar” which means door. Thus Haridwar means the door that leads human beings to the God.

\(^{65}\) The dwelling of saints
When Parsa returns home, Tindi tells him about the death of Meena and the arrest of Basanta by the police. Parsa remains indifferent and start living the routine life of a farmer. Mukhtiar Kaur one day sends Parsa a message to come to her village and take the possession of her property. She also indicates that he soon is going to be the legal owner of that. At her house, Parsa recognizes her maid Savitri, to whom he was once to be engaged. Parsa returns home and after few days he learns that Basanta has been killed in an ‘encounter’ with the police. Parsa remains indifferent and does not lose his normal behaviour over the death of his dearest son. He thinks of making a *smadhi*[^66] in his memory but abandon his plans on the advice of a sculptor Hazoora. Parsa repairs his old house in the village and shifts there with his cow and Tindi.

After some time, Sant Narang Das calls Parsa to Haridwar and tells him that Mukhtiar Kaur has died while giving birth to a male child who according to her is his (Parsa’s) son. Parsa indifferently accepts his son and sign a paper on which his marriage is legalized with Mukhtiar Kaur according to the religious customs. Narang Das asks Savitri to go along with Parsa because there is no other member in Parsa’s house to take care of the child. Parsa returns home with the child and Savitry. He names the child Basanta and the calf Meena. The life resumes and returns to its previous rhythm.

*Parsa* is not only the story of an ordinary peasant as it seems from the brief account of its narrative sequence that we have just discussed. But it has very deep philosophical thoughts also. The author has presented very minute details of the Punjabi culture especially of its peasantry through different vivid and subtle metaphors chosen from the day-to-day lives of its characters. Parsa, the protagonist of the novel, is not as simple a character as it appears to the readers at a first glance. He is a man who has his own vision towards life. He does not only lead his life according to this vision but also inspires many other characters like Pala *Raagi*[^67] and Sant Narang Das.

[^66]: A monument erected in the memory of a dead person
[^67]: A person who sings in the praise of God [usually *shabads* from Guru Granth Sahib (the holy scripture of Sikhs)]
and Manisha Nand to follow him. His uncommon physical strength, courage, miraculous ability to deal with different existential situations, mental stability, consistency of behaviour and stoicism echo a heroic persona in him. This persona differentiates him from an ordinary illiterate peasant. It would therefore be imperative, first of all, to know in what respect Parsa is different from his fellow beings and in which way he should be considered as a symbol of heroism rather than considering him an ordinary being.

**Parsa and His Anarchist Visions**

Anarchism, if we put it very simply, is that condition in which a being lives without any social imposition and moral sophistication. It can also be referred to a situation in which a human being is not governed by any outside law but by his inner conscience only. Eric Hobsbawm in his “utterly fascinating book” (as per *New Yorker* review) *Bandits* describes anarchism as:

‘The idea’ of anarchism was their motive: that totally uncompromising and lunatic dream which a great many of us share, but which few except Spaniards have ever tried to act upon, at the cost of total defeat and impotence for their labour movement. Theirs was the world in which men are governed by pure morality as dictated by conscience; where there is no poverty, no government, no jails, no policemen, no compulsion and discipline except that of inner light; no social bond except fraternity and love; no lies; no property; no bureaucracy. In this world men are pure like Sabaté, who never smoked or drank and ate like a shepherd even when he had just robbed a bank. In this world, reason and enlightenment bring men out of darkness. Nothing stands between us and this ideal except, even backsliding anarchists, forces which must be swept away, though of course without our falling into the diabolical pitfalls of discipline and bureaucracy…. Propaganda by action replaces that by word.

When we analyze the life of Parsa, we without any doubt get attracted to the idea that his world is constructed by his concrete actions. And moreover, his actions are derived from his inner conscience and are not forced upon him by any institution or society. He neither pays any heed to the customs of society nor cares for the laws of
the government. Law, according to him, exists only for those who voluntarily give value to it. He himself does not know anything about the legitimacy of the rules created by a few human beings to dominate others. He resists at every point when asked to obey those rules. At the time of the death of his wife Biro, he violates almost every custom and nobody has the strength to stop him.

Parsa was about to offer fodder to the cattle when Boby came rushing in. The moment she entered, beating her thighs, she broke into a loud lament.

‘You have left us and gone, O daughter! What time have you chosen to leave… O my queen of a daughter!’

‘Taayi!’ Parsa virtually chided her in a loud gruff voice, ‘Just drop this. I won’t allow any such nonsense. Do you understand?’

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‘Weh Parsia, my son, why did you do this? Such a blunder! How will she attain salvation, cursed by her own Karma.’

‘Taayi, you’d better stop being ridiculous now. Go and sit quietly in the corner. And don’t shoot off your mouth again.’

Boby’s entire body was quaking with fear as she stepped out. She was heard saying, ‘what a blunder! What a sin!’ (9-10)

In Punjabi culture, at least at the level of rural peasantry (where almost everybody knows each other and even their relatives and friends), death of a person does not remain a personal matter rather it becomes a concern for the whole village. There is a long list of customs and rituals which are observed between the death of a person and his/her bhog but we will discuss only few of them here. The people of that village regard it their responsibility to share the grief with the family whose family-member is dead. They generally do not take part in any kind of celebration till

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68 Fate

69 In Sikhs, the completion of the recitation of Guru Granth Sahib is called bhog. It generally occurs at the 7th day after the cremation of the dead person. On this occasion the relatives and the villagers gather at the house of the dead person or in a nearby Gurudwara, listen to the bani from Guru Granth Sahib, take their lunch (which is arranged by the family of a dead person) and depart. It is considered, at least formally, that after bhog the God will take care of the departed soul and everybody should return to their routine work.
the *bhog* or the *kiriya*. They do not let their children listen to the loud music and do not cook sweets in their houses. They even do not celebrate the most awaited festival like *diwali* that year when there is an unexpected death in the village. The people of the family of dead person do not sleep on the beds till the *bhog*. The neighbours cook meal for the family members of the dead person because according to the customs the soul of the person does not find peace if food is being cooked in his/her own house till the *bhog*. After the cremation, some people of the village along with the relatives go to console the in-laws of the dead person and in the same way, if the dead person is a married female, her parents along with the villagers and relatives come to share grief over the death to her in-laws.

The hold of these customs and rituals are so strong that a normal person, however rational he may be in other matters of his life, finds it very difficult to oppose them. It does not mean that it is impossible to oppose them; however, one cannot do it without declaring himself an anarchist. He becomes the one who does not care for any law or social relationships. Outlawry becomes a part of his personality and it may lead him to the larger level i.e. the level from where one starts rebelling against the laws of state. To take this step one must have exceptional courage and consistent determinedness.

Parsa’s position in the novel and the ways adopted by him to stand against the dominant social ideology really make him an anarchist. He does not compromise with the problematic situations. No social force can bind him to a pre-set behaviour. His free mindedness does not let him behave according to the specific social customs. He rebels against them in every situation. At the death of his beloved wife Biro he does not change his attitude and everybody is annoyed and astonished by the way he behaves.

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70 In Hindus, *Kiriya* generally takes place on the fourth day after the death of a person. On this occasion, a *pandit* recites the *mantras* from the old scriptures for the peace of the soul of a dead person.
When they reached the pond, sliding up to Parsa and looking around, the family priest Kashi Ram said, ‘Stop here, we have to break the earthen pitcher.’ Kashi Ram was no stranger to Parsa’s temper but he hadn’t imagined that on such occasion he would behave so. Darting an angry glance at him Parsa said, ‘Everything that was here is with me, Panditji Maharaj! Nothing has been lost. So this ritual is unnecessary.’ (10)

A little latter when Parsa was returning from the pyre of Biro, Tirath Ram asks him:

‘Did you put the bone aside?’ ….

Surprised, Parsa said, ‘Which bone?’

‘The one that is set aside so that it can be buried nearby. What else?’

‘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.’

The antagonism here is between the pressure of social forces which are in no way less powerful than that of the state power and the courage of Parsa which is no less than that of an epic hero. He knows all the tactics, like an experienced warrior, which help him to fight against these forces. His persona echoes the image of Dulla Bhatti who refused to obey Akbar, the great Mughal emperor and declared himself a being without any master. He was a perfect anarchist, a rebel and a “social bandit.”

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71 In ancient times, when there was lack of medical facilities and doctors, the death of a person was confirmed by moving around the corpse, holding an earthen pitcher in hand (usually having milk in it) and breaking the pitcher after completing the circle. If a person (assumed as dead) did not come to consciousness before the pitcher had broken, the Pandits confirmed his/her death. Breaking of an earthen pitcher symbolized the breaking of all relations with the dead person. This ritual is still performed in some parts of India in Brahmin families.

72 It is believed that the practitioners of Black Magic can control the spirit of the dead person by gathering the complete skeleton from the pyre. By putting the bone aside, one can prevent the sorcerer to get the complete skeleton; consequently, this disables him to control the spirit of the dead person.

73 A term derived from historian Eric Hobsbawm. According to him a “social bandit” is an outlaw who robs people, fights with the system which he considers wrong. He opposes any kind of authority not only for the greed of money but to prove himself as a free man. He does not harm the poor or the helpless rather helps them in different situations and thus becomes hero of that community.
Throughout his life he did not care for any law or social burden. He robbed many rich people and helped the poor. The courage shown by Parsa in the novel can be compared with the courage and bravery of Dulla in many ways. Though Parsa does not indulge in the physical fight with the “repressive structures” of the state (the way Dulla did) yet his ideology, attitude and the spirit of resistance have striking similarity with that of Dulla.

Parsa’s manner of rebellion is of a metaphysical type. As we have mentioned earlier (in the first chapter), Metaphysical rebellion opposes ideas rather than persons. It opposes every notion which does not let a person to act according to his inner conscience. Direct bloody wars and the killings are not its part; instead, it is a fight between the self and the other or any outer direction which are designed to control human actions. the slave does not protest his master but the condition of his state of slavery. And if he accepts it, he corroborates its legitimacy and as a consequence he admits that the idea of slavery is correct and the others should also experience it like him.

Parsa, in the same way, rebels against the shallow social norms with courage and bravery. His fight is against those norms which have been pre-determined to make him behave in a certain way. For Parsa, they are the restrictions in his free way of living according to his conscience. He does not tolerate these restrictions as a passive being and stands against them firmly. Another point which should be noticed here is that Parsa’s behaviour does not change with the passage of time. He opposes these customs at the time of the death of his favourite son Basanta with the same strength that he had shown at the death of his wife Biro.

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 sniffing through....

‘Hai, hai, daughter, what sort of men are they? He was young, and it’s such a tragic death, but still Parsa hasn’t allowed anyone to grieve as much as one does over the death of a cat or dog. Some people are scared of the world, others of God but they seem to bother about neither. (235)
Parsa certainly does not have an agitated mind of a victim but a strong determination and self-confidence during his fight against these shallow social norms. He is different from Jagsir (*The Last Flicker*), Bishna (*The Survivors*) and Modan (*Night of the Half Moon*) in the sense that he does not suffer endlessly like them. His conditions, though he has to face the deaths of his beloved wife Biro and the dearest son Basanta, do not exhaust him like other characters. He does not feel lonely, desolate and tragic anywhere in the discourse. He keeps on challenging all those norms which he regards meaningless or wrong. He does not pour *Ganga jal*\(^{74}\) in the mouth of his dying wife and not even set her down on the floor after death\(^{75}\). The meaning of salvation for Parsa is different from all others characters in the novel. On one occasion he tries to make Tindi (his farm-hand) understand about this matter as:

‘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* ad *karma* or sin and virtue. For the likes of us… 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.’

‘They also claim that this is where everything is, and beyond this, there is no other world.’ (207)

Parsa’s base in rejecting these ideas is formed by reason, the awakening of conscience, which seems to be in direct conflict with these customs. This awakening of conscience leads him to outlawry, the rejection of tradition and authority. In his world, everybody is free and has the right to live one’s life according to his own way. The concept of dominance of a human over another human does not exist for him or he is unable to understand it. He gives full space to his sons to choose their own way.

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\(^{74}\) The water of the river Ganges. In Hindu religion, *Ganga Jal* is considered as a holy water and they pour it in the mouth of a dying person so that his/her soul get pure before going to the God.

\(^{75}\) It is a custom of Hindu community that they set the dead body down on the floor. If they do not do likewise, it is believed that the soul of the dead person does not get redemption easily.
Basanta does not like studying and he permits him to work in the fields with him. The other two sons want to study further and he lets them do that. Although he does not like the ideas of two of his elder sons (to do jobs and settle in the cities) yet he does not compel them to live with him in the village. He does not interfere in their decisions of marriages neither does he give any suggestion about that. He has his own space and it is not tolerable to him that anybody should interfere in that. And in the same way he himself does not interfere in the space of anybody even if they are his own sons. He acknowledges the fact that apart from being his sons they are independent human beings and he has no right to mend or influence their ways. On one occasion, when Basanta comes to know that the marriage of Gangi (his fiancée) has been fixed against her wish by her parents to Master Kishan Chand, he tells his plans to Parsa as:

‘So Bapu, should I show them the gates of hell for he next seven lives?’

Asked Basanta smiling.

‘Once you contemplate, you’re as good as dead. Besides what is there to think in this matter? Don’t you feel, it’s our right?’

That moment Parsa’s eyes had a sudden flash of gleam, and his full, rounded and copper-coloured face blazed, as if on fire. Stepping forward and resting his strong hand upon Basanta’s left shoulder, he said, ‘It’s all right. My blessings are with you.’ (60)

A little later, after Basanta cut the arm of Master Kishan Chand, the police comes to enquire about him from Parsa in his fields. Parsa replies:

The whole commotion was about our rights. And the boy dealt with it the way he thought proper. That was his wish. I’d nothing to do with it. (101)

In this world there are mainly two types of people: first, whose actions conform to the pre-decided ways or in other words who do exactly the same what is expected from them by society, their surroundings, or the state; second, who first of all question these norms and then decide their actions. They stand against what is expected from them by society and the state and therefore behave as anarchists. Apart from being the member of society each one of us is an individual with a different mind and different
conscience. The major reason behind this protest remains the space which society does not provide to the individuals. There comes a point, an awakening of the conscience, when an individual decides to say “no” to his pre-fixed behaviour that has not been decided by him but by someone else. The anarchist is the one who does not accept this pre-fixed ways to live.

In the world of anarchism, no institution has the power to inspire or control human actions. Every law and principle is derived from one’s own inner conscience. For Parsa, a police-inspector and the DSP (whose daughter Jetha is married to) have same value as his farm-hand Tindi has. It does not matter whom he is talking to. Law, according to him, is not a natural phenomenon but has been created to execute the dominance of a few people over larger number of people. For an anarchist like Parsa, laws make the world complex and the earth a ruthless place to live on. Parsa says to the policeman:

‘Law?’ Parsa spoke in a firm but sarcastic tone. ‘Havaldar Sahib, now laws haven’t been made by God either. Which law states that when a criminal flees after the crime, you strip the daughters and sisters from his home and bash them up. Or tug at beards of the older men. Or arrest the entire family and hurl them behind bars. But this is precisely what is happening. Law only serves those who wield bludgeons.’

The havaldar was caught in a dilemma…. For the first time he had encountered a man who didn’t fear the police and the law in the least. Neither did he show any sighns of remourse over his son’s irrational and unmotivated act of attempt to murder. Nor did the prospect of his son being punished for the deed deter him in any manner. (101-02)

Parsa resists against his surrounding and the system with the slogan: back to the “old law.” It means going back to the life-style of “pre-modern agrarian societies” (Hobsbawm 183). These pre-modern agrarian societies were “straight societies.” According to Hobsbawm, “the ‘straight’ society of peasants including peasant bandits functioned in terms of ‘law’ – God’s law and the common custom, which was different from the state’s or the lords’ law, but nevertheless a social order. And in so far as it conceived of a better society it thought of it as the return to an old law….” This “old law” was the law of morality which was not enforced by any religion or state but came
from within, the inner conscience. Mutual love and friendship were not motivated by profit and loss. Except on very basic level, there was not a consistent authority to control human actions. People used to settle their disputes in whatever way they found appropriate, without consulting any higher authority (Hobsbawm 179-80).

After keenly observing the discourse of the novel, one can easily confer that all the actions of Parsa have been inspired by what Hobsbawm has termed as the “old law.” He is a Brahmin by birth but a peasant by profession. He has been called a Jat-brahmin in the discourse by the author. According to Irfan Habib, historically no description of the Jats is available before the seventh century, though scholarly ingenuity may find solitary references in Sanskrit texts to tribes bearing similar names. He further quotes Hiuen Tsang arguing that ‘by the side of the river, there are several hundreds of thousands (a very great number) families settled....They give themselves to tending cattle and from this derive their livelihood.... They have no masters, and whether men or women, are neither rich nor poor. They claimed to be Buddhists, but they are of an unfeeling temper and hasty disposition….’ Alberuni (c. 1030), whose direct experience of India was confined to the Lahore area, took the Jats to be the ‘cattle owners,’ low Shudra People…. The four centuries between the eleventh and the sixteenth not only saw a great expansion of Jat population; these also apparently witnessed a great transformation in their economic basis, there being a remarkable conversion from pastoralism to agriculture….” (Habib). Habib also admits that there is a possibility that the men of other castes took to agriculture and, in the course of time, declared themselves as Jats by virtue of their profession. Whatever the case may be, with the passing of time the connection of the Jats with peasantry has become so close that besides being a caste-name, the word Jat has come to mean an agriculturalist. This is what happens with Parsa too. He belongs to the caste of Brahmins by birth but becomes a Jat by virtue of his profession. He becomes a true representative of the Jats in the sense that he has “no master” and he is “neither rich nor poor.” He is having “an unfeeling temper and hasty disposition” and thus fits into the image of Jats portrayed by Hiuen Tsang. Behaving like a true Jat means acknowledging no authority or having no master. And this without any doubt is the situation of an anarchist.
The only law Parsa acknowledges is the old pastoral law which is governed by his conscience and not by any outer source. He is not happy with Jetha and Pohla, his two elder sons. The reason behind this unhappiness is their so-called modern behaviour and attitude which they have adopted while living in the industrial urban setting. Their behaviour and actions conform to the laws of the establishment and, as an anarchist, it is not tolerable to Parsa. Let us see a conversation between Parsa and Pohla who has recently been appointed as a *chota-thanedar*:

Parsa says to Pohla:

‘If you had it in you to go Banaras, you wouldn’t have got into such canine jobs.’

‘You mean, it’s a disgusting job?’

‘No! This is worthier than reading *Vedas*. Beat up anyone you want, and extract what you can from whomsoever, what can be more sacred than this job?’ (116)

Pohla asks Parsa:

‘*Bapu* I’ve to go to Sangrur on duty. Today is my first day there.’

‘When did I put a rope around your neck? Go wherever you want. I neither expect you to slaughter any dacoits for me nor do I want any of the dreaded thieves arrested. With your beard tied under your chin, you may go wherever you wish. It’s your raaj, after all?’

….  

So you see, how the truth keeps popping bit by bit! Meeting them is only a pretext. All you want to tell the villagers is that now you’ve become a *thanedar*. And now you expect people to lend you their horses and even send an unpaid labourer to see you off. Aren’t these very thoughts flitting your mind at the moment?’ Asked Parsa, laughing heartily. (118-19)

‘You may interpret it whichever way you want. If you have vowed not to talk straight ever, what can anyone do?’

‘Right now, what I’m saying may appear distorted to you, Pohla Singha! As if you, the big *sardars* are the only ones capable of straight talk! Besides, when did I claim to talk straight? Right from the day one I’ve been treading the wrong track.’ (120)

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‘But you know that if I haven’t acknowledged your government all my life, why would I bow before its law?’ (141)
Parsa considers the job of police as a “canine job” because for him, doing this job means to serve the establishment, to proffer and propagate the ways and means of the authority. According to Parsa this way of living causes a great hindrance to the freedom of an individual. He is not happy with Pohla because he becomes the part of that authority. When Parsa says “it’s your raj76 after all,” the situation becomes crystal clear. The father and the son appear to be standing opposite to each other. In this relation, Parsa, like a pure anarchist, is repudiating the world that Pohla represents. The discourse turns ironical when Parsa says that the track chosen by Pohla is “right” because it conforms to the state ideology while Parsa’s own track is “wrong” because it rejects his position as a slave by virtually declaring him an anarchist. This contradiction continues till the end of the novel. Parsa is obviously not happy with both of his elder sons but at the same time he does not try to make his relations better with them. He criticizes their ways, which he considers inappropriate and culpable according to the “old pastoral laws,” but does not compel them to leave them. He would have been happy if his son had become an outlaw. The idea of submitting oneself to an authority can not exalt Parsa’s heart in any way.

He likes his younger son Basanta because, contrary to his brothers, he stands against the establishment by joining the Naxalite group (it has been discussed in detail later in this chapter). He refutes the authority of the establishment at every front of his life and, that is why, becomes the favourite son of Parsa. Parsa does not feel regret over the violent action committed by Basanta rather he feels happy. When Pala raagi looks worried for Basanta, Parsa says:

‘So what? They can’t hang him,’ this time Parsa’s tone was somewhat harsher. ‘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? … Bhai, Pala Singh, sometimes you get worked up without any reason. As if this is something worth getting anxious about?’ (93)

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76 Reign
Our speculation about the position of Parsa would indeed prove incomplete if we do not consider his deep sense of morality. Nobody can become a hero or people’s champion without having a sympathetic and compassionate heart. Whatever the case may be, a just man would always be a restorer of morality. This sense of morality cannot be derived without the idea of the goodwill of the large number of people, or on the larger level, of the whole of humanity. It includes the spirit to “right” what is “wrong” in the world. Dulla Bhatti fought against the authorities with this spirit. He never made the poor or helpless the target of his wrath rather he always helped them in different situations. Robin Hood served as an agent of justice and a restorer of morality. Francisco Sabaté Llopard, a worldwide famous anarchist, too had this great sense of morality. We would like to discuss a small real incident of his life here.

Two days later they [Sabaté and his friends] were surrounded in a lonely farm and besieged for twelve hours. After the setting of the moon Sabaté stampeded the cattle with a hand-grenade and crept silently away after killing his last policeman; but wounded. All his companions were killed. Two days latter, on 6 January, he held up the 6.20 train from Gerona to Barcelona at the small stop of Fornells and [with a gun in his hand] ordered the deriver to go straight through. It was impossible, for at Massanet-Massanas all trains switch to electric traction. By this time Sabaté’s foot-wound had turned septic. He limped, had a high fever, and kept himself going with morphine injections from his first-aid kit. The other two wounds, a graze behind the ear and an entry-and-exit wound in the shoulder, were less serious. He ate the engine-crew’s breakfast.

At Massanet he slipped into the post-van, climbed on the new electric engine and worked his way forward to the driver’s cabin. He held up the new crew. They also told him that it was impossible, short of risking accidents, to drive straight to the Barcelona in defiance of the timetable. At this stage…he knew that he would die…. He could no doubt have forced the engine-crews of his train to drive through…but he could not, morally, risk the lives of men who did not fight him. (Hobsbawm 135-38).

What was it that did not allow Sabaté to enforce the engine crews (he was sure that he would be caught and killed by police if he did not reach Barcelona) – a deep sense of morality, the spirit of taking care of his country men. He was an anarchist and fighter of rare quality but with a noble heart and this made him a hero, a “public legend.”
Parsa shares this deep sense of morality with Dulla Bhatti, Robin Hood and Sabaté. No doubt Parsa has been shown as a rough and sturdy man throughout the discourse but this factor does not overcome his deep sense of morality and humane concern for the poor, just and helpless people. At many places in the discourse he has been depicted as having a compassionate heart towards his farm-hand Tindi, the postman and Jai Ram’s farm-hand’s downcast wife. At one place he says to Tindi, “No my dear, you take it easy. As for work, you’ve your entire life to slog. You catch up on sleep as much as you can” (117). Moreover, he treats him like his own son and at many places in the novel we feel that in Parsa’s world Tindi has greater value than Jetha and Pohla. He respects his life-long companion and friend Pala raagi more than anything else in this world. He does not give away the manja\textsuperscript{77} on which Pala breaths his last to majhabi-sikhs but decides to keep it “as a token of his ‘colourful’ friend’s memory”\textsuperscript{78} (156). His temperament towards animals makes us believe that he is really having a gracious heart. His son-like bull Meena is unable to bear his absence, and while he is away in Haridwar, dies yearning for him. He does not tell a lie during his life, not even to the police to save the life of his son Basanta. On the contrary, he admires those who tell the truth however bitter it may be. He stands on his words and considers it unfair to change his decisions afterwards like Jai Ram (Gangi’s father) does. With all these qualities, Parsa, though incapable of obeying any instructions with which he disagreed, emerges as a very lovable character and nobody can refrain oneself from admiring him.

It is a very interesting thing to note that folk heroes, social bandits or rebels throughout the world are bound to be concerned with anarchism in one way or the other. No person who conforms to and proffers the ideas of the establishment, however impeccably he does so, can become a “folk legend” the way an anarchist or social bandit can. Heroism depends on how bravely one can oppose authority rather than how efficiently one can serve under it. Whether it is Robin Hood, Francisco Sabaté Llopard,

\textsuperscript{77} Cot

\textsuperscript{78} It is a custom in Punjabi culture that nobody keeps the cot in his house on which one dies and the clothes the dead person wearing at the time of death. The people usually give these things to the lower-caste people.
Earnest Che Guevara, Pancho Villa, Dulla Bhatti or Jeona Maur – all were nonconformists and anarchists. Parsa and Basanta befall in their lineage and thus are fit to be called heroes while Jetha and Pohla choose easy ways to lead their lives and therefore are conformists.

**Parsa and His Desire to Become God**

‘I think if the devil doesn’t exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness.’

‘Just as he did God, then?’ observed Alyosha. (Dostoevsky 221)

The above statement is made by Ivan Karamazov in Dostoevsky’s famous philosophical novel *The Karamazov Brothers* after telling a heart rendering incident about the sufferings in the world. He narrates the incident as:

‘By the way, a Bulgarian I met lately in Moscow,’ Ivan went on…, ‘told me about the crimes committed by Turks and Circassians in all parts of Bulgaria through fear of a general rising of the Slavs. They burn villages, murder, outrage women and children, they nail their prisoners by the ears to the fences, leave them so till morning, and in the morning they hang them- all sorts of things you can’t imagine. People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that’s a great injustice and insult to the beasts; a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel. The tiger only tears and gnaws, that’s all he can do. He would never think of nailing people by ears, even if he were able to do it. These Turks took a pleasure in torturing children, too; cutting the unborn child from their mothers’ womb, and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on the points of their bayonets before their mother’s eyes…. Imagine a trembling mother with her baby in her arms, a circle of invading Turks around her. They’ve planned a diversion: they pet the baby, laugh to make it laugh. They succeed, the baby laughs. At that moment a Turk points a pistol four inches from the baby’s face. The baby laughs with glee, holds out its little hands to the pistol, and he pulls the trigger in the baby’s face and blows out its brain. Artistic, wasn’t it?’ (221)

Ivan narrates another story in which a serf-boy of eight threw a stone in play which hurt the paw of a general’s favourite hound. The general ordered to shut up the child in a dark room for all night. The next morning he ordered the child to be
undressed and made him run. Then he set the whole pack of hounds on the child while he was running. The hounds caught him and tore him to pieces in front of his mother’s eyes. The general was afterwards declared incapable of administering his estates and was transferred to another. Ivan deliberately chooses these stories of children to make his point clear that there is abundance of injustice and sufferings on this earth. The stories of the sufferings of children imply that even those who do not commit any sin have to suffer endlessly which is unambiguously an act of injustice. No reward, even if getting salvation itself, can compensate the sufferings of innocent children, helpless labourers and subjugated beings prevailing on this earth. If we consider, only for a moment, that God has created this world it directly leads to two possibilities. First, God himself has created this injustice by giving consent to the sufferings of the innocents. Second, if God has not intended this injustice on the earth, it means He has no control over those who cause injustice and sufferings on the earth. In both cases we can challenge His authority and superiority over human beings. In the first case, if He himself has created the world He is responsible for the sufferings of the innocents. And if He is responsible for the sufferings then what is the difference between Him and the Devil or we can doubt His powers to judge the difference between what is good or noble or just and what is evil or cruel or unjust. In the second case, if He has no control over those who cause sufferings of the innocents then how can he be superior to a human? In both cases, He is not worth calling the Master. Ivan says:

… I don’t accept this world of God’s… I don’t accept it all. It’s not that I don’t accept God, you must understand, it’s the world created by Him I don’t and cannot accept. (Dostoevsky 217)

Not accepting the world means not accepting it with injustice. One cannot reject something without thinking for its alternative. If man does not accept God’s world then the next question arises: who can God be replaced with? Since Devil cannot be the right choice because it has nothing to do with justice, morality and truthfulness, man must think of creating God within his own image. This is what Ivan means when he says:
'I think if the devil doesn’t exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness.'

‘Just as he did God, then?’ observed Alyosha.  (Dostoevsky 221)

This is the stage when man declares himself free from the world of God and desires to take His position. Different philosophers and thinkers have described this situation as “the desire to become God.” Two principal figures among them are Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre. We will discuss Jean Paul Sartre later in this chapter. Let us discuss the conception of Camus first.

According to Albert Camus, “The master of the world, after his legitimacy has been contested, must be overthrown. Man must occupy his place. ‘As God and immorality do not exist, the new man is permitted to become God.’ But what does becoming God mean? To recognize any other law but one’s own” (Camus, The Rebel 85). Thus, according to Camus, the fundamental condition to become God is to value one’s own conscience and decisions rather than accepting the reality of the outer world. This “new man” who is permitted to become God will not be able to give value to any authority rather he would re-judge the concepts of good and evil from his inner conscience. Camus further concludes that according to Dostoevsky’s intellectuals “to become God is to accept crime” (Camus, The Rebel 53). But here Camus needs to be corrected for the reason: if we reject God’s world for injustice and illogical sufferings how we can make them a part of the “new” God. The argument is - if “to become God is to accept crime” and injustice then what the need to replace the old one is. We cannot reject one and accept other, though the other might be our own conscience, for the same qualities. The “new” God created in the image of man itself must be different from the traditional God. To rebel against traditional God one must stop accepting the sufferings of innocent children, helpless labourers and subjugated beings. Illogical crimes must come to an end rather than to be the part of system. One can have the desire to become God but for it, he must follow Ivan about whom Camus says:

With Ivan, however, the tone changes. God is put on trial, in His turn. If evil is essential to divine creation, then creation is unacceptable. Ivan will no longer have recourse to this mysterious God, but to a higher principle, namely justice. He launches
the essential undertaking of rebellion, which is that of replacing the reign of grace by the reign of justice. (Camus, *The Rebel* 50)

Man must possess different parameters if he wants to replace the world of God with his own image. The desire to become God is the desire to correct what is wrong in the world. For it, man must have the desire to protect the innocents and ought to become the fountainhead of justice rather than to be the “fountainhead of hate” or love. He would no doubt accept violence but only to end the cruelty and injustice prevailing on the earth. And if he cannot have the desire to do so he has no right to challenge and reject the world of the existing God.

Our concern now is to see whether Parsa stands by the world created by the God or he rejects it in favour of human conscience. On the surface level and from the very first impression, readers find him a religious being who loves to talk about the stories of mythical characters taken from *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata* and we can often hear him singing the *shabads* taken from some religious narrative. But his underlying spirit remains in conflict with the ways of the world created by God. He keeps on challenging traditional religious myths throughout the discourse. At the time of the death of his wife, he refutes almost every notion which, according to Hindu religion, is necessary to attain redemption from the Lord. He does not acknowledge any custom instead gives value to concrete human reality. Death, for him, is not a sad message sent by God but an inevitable human situation which it is bound to come. The idea of taking redemption from God for one’s deeds does not interest him. He even does not believe in the concept of life-after-death which creates the foundation of the whole Indian religious ideology. He says to Tindi:

…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….this is where everything is, and beyond this, there is no other world.” (270)

Not only on the death of his wife Biro, but on the death of his friend Pala and his favourite son Basanta, his behaviour demonstrates a peculiar kind of sustainability.
He remains static, stoic and indifferent from the beginning to the end of the novel. Even at the moments of sadness and hopelessness, Parsa does not rely upon apathetic God as most men do in similar situations rather he is well aware of the fact that as a human being, he will have to bear this alone. He sings:

I’m a charred tree of the forest
Burning my wood they turn me into embers
And the embers turn into ashes
My restless eyes never shut
Remain wide-open
I’ve no place to live or stay
Neither my parent’s nor my in-laws.
The searing burns of my soul
I must bear all alone
.... (153-54)

Analyzing deeply the character of Parsa we find that he does not belong to a particular religion or caste rather serves as a symbol and metaphor of whole Punjabi life in the novel. By birth he belongs to the family of brahmins and thus is an upper caste Hindu. But he does not care a bit for the customs and rituals particular to his caste. He is neither a Sikh (though from appearance and life-style, he seems closer to it) nor a Muslim though he can be heard singing “completely entranced” like a fakir.

Tindi had not been able to figure out the enigma that was Parsa. Sometimes he appeared more like a giant to him and at times, a man like other men. Occasionally he appeared to be raagi or a poet and sometimes an indifferent jat. What was, indeed, amazing was that neither Parsa nor his sons had ever seemed to be brahmins. No puja-path, tilak or sacred thread, havan-yagna; they would never do any such things. They had not even kept small idols (Thakars) in their house the way some other brahmins had (148).

Parsa only knows one religion and that is of karma-dharma. For Parsa, being in action (karma) means doing one’s duty (dharma) in “the service of mankind because man alone is the personification of Brahma” (193). According to this ideology, man needs to be in action for the sake of justice and welfare of humanity. The use of
shakti\textsuperscript{79} is permitted wherever necessary to end the cruelty and sufferings in the world. Parsa says to Manisha Nand at an occasion:

What it really means is that the way to moksha does not necessarily lie through the fulfillment of our desires or worldly goals. We have a duty or dharma even towards the fakir, the dejected, weak or helpless. Unless one understands that dharma, one remains as ignorant as ever. One even fails to do his dharma. (197)

Following this ideology, he is not inspired by any religion or divine order. He regards man’s inner conscience as the source of human action because no one else can decide on behalf of any other human being. Since man is “condemned to be free” (Sartre, Being and Nothingness 439), he has to decide his actions individually according to his conscience. Parsa says:

The meaning of dharma, too, changes according to time and circumstances….This is something that only a man’s inner conscience can decide. I think no granthi or gyani can settle this question…. It dawned on raagi that this bit about dharma being a matter of individual conscience was something he had grasped perhaps for the first time in his life. He felt like bowing before Parsa in reverence. Then, plumbing the depths of emotions, he said, ‘You’re absolutely right. It’s the truth. How can dharma, karma, truth and falsehood mean the same to everyone. Each one of us interprets them according to his own understanding and intelligence. So, in a way, it’s the inner conscience that decides everything. This is how I perceive it. (25)

For Camus, this is the moment of awakening of the conscience when an individual decides to give value to the self rather than to any other authority. The desire to become God is its next step when one refutes the world of God and starts considering himself to be the fountainhead of justice. In this phase one aspires to correct what is wrong in the world and prepares himself to be in action to accomplish his mission. Parsa’s world is the world of action. He defends himself bravely when some unidentified persons attack him. He does not forbid Basanta when he decides to attack Master Kishan Chand whom he has already given a warning. Gangi’s parents silently fix her marriage with Master Kishan Chand and break their promise given to

\textsuperscript{79} Power
Parsa for the reason that Basanta is a farmer while Master Kishan Chand is having a government job. For Parsa this is injustice and Basanta has full right to be in action to correct the wrong done against him. When Basanta decides to fight against the establishment – which according to him is not based on human values rather is cruel in its approach – by joining the Naxalite movement, Parsa gives him an unspoken consent because he thinks Basanta is fighting for the justice and a noble cause.

The strongest charge against God that Ivan discovers is his insensitivity towards the innocents, poor and subjugated. He questions the functioning of God when he thinks: what kind of God He is who wants “horses to be beaten,” children to be tortured, nobles to be tormented and labourers to be exploited. When Camus permits the “new man” to have the desire to become God, he imagines him to be free from the insensitivity God possesses towards the humanity. Parsa is that “new man” who has a compassionate heart not only towards the poor and the helpless but the whole biodiversity around him. He treats his farm-hand Tindi like his own son and never in the novel has he made him feel that he is a poor, helpless and inferior being. On a place he even rebukes his son Jetha favouring Tindi as: “He [Tindi] is right. If you [Jetha] take it amiss, it’s your problem. Why prove him to be a fool when it’s you who can’t figure out a thing?” (134).

Akin to Tindi, Parsa regards his bull Meena as a member of his family. For Parsa, Meena is not an object to be beaten up or a tool of utility for their profession i.e. agriculture. For him, Meena is a life-long companion, a friend who understands him better than his own sons or any other human being. Meena is so austerely attached with Parsa that when he goes away to Haridwar for a few days, he [Meena] could not bear the separation and dies yearning for him. The relation between Parsa and Meena is not a relation of master and slave but of accompanying beings. Meena has been introduced in the novel as a descendant of the lineage of Parsa. Instead of two bulls, Basanta yokes Meena alone to plough the land which symbolizes the amazing physical strength of Parsa’s lineage and their nature to deal with their affairs alone. In Punjabi culture, the name “Meena” denotes a bull that has its horns bended towards downward along with the skull. It is usually believed that “Meena” is auspicious for the coming
generations and remains loyal to his master till the end. Meena, in the novel Parsa, remains loyal to Parsa like a comrade and therefore stands up to the cultural standards attributed to the name “Meena.” With every bellow of Meena, the head of Parsa rises up in pride. On Parsa’s demand Meena would bellow and with his left hoof, would give such a kick that a cloud of dust rises up to sky. Parsa feels pride and says, “Well done! This sound is enough to rejuvenate a man like me, o my lion!....” (120).

Parsa’s desire to become God is derived from his attitude of serving the humanity. According to him it is very easy to deny one’s familial responsibilities and lead ascetic life like Sant Narang Das. Sant Narang Das leaves his village and starts living an ascetic life at a dera in Haridwar in search of God and moksha. Parsa influences Narang Das with his philosophy of life and shows him the right path. Parsa teaches Manisha Nand that man himself is an image of God and he need not find it anywhere else. While leading ordinary familial life, if a person strives to end injustice happening around him and have a compassionate heart towards the helpless and poor, there is no need to find God on mountains and in forests.

Camus’ concept of “the desire to become God” is inspired by moral implications which an individual decides according to his conscience, while Sartrian concept of “the desire to become God” is more complex and can only be discussed through the typical terminology of existentialism. According to Sartre, there are two categories of beings. The first category is human reality which he calls being-for-itself and the second is everything else – everything of nature except man – which he calls being-in-itself. The characteristics of being-for-itself are pure consciousness and absolute freedom. We cannot study pure consciousness and absolute freedom differently for the reason that they work together. The nature and existence of these two terms are complementary. It is therefore impossible at the same time to be conscious and not to be free. Sartre says man is condemned to be free because he owns consciousness and on its basis he has to choose in different existential situations. Hence, human existence falls under the category of being-for-itself. Frederick Patka writes:
The *for-itself* is impersonal, non-substantial, negative rather than positive, and actually nothing (no thing) simply ‘a hole in being’ rather than being itself. The characteristics of *being-in-itself* are immobility and passivity and complete lack of any knowledge or consciousness—just massive being or ‘dumb packed-togetherness.’ These two regions are unalterably opposed, and this bipolarity is the crux of Sartre’s system. (Patka 128)

In his famous novel *Nausea*, Sartre says, “Every existing thing is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness and dies by chance” (124). But in the course of one’s life, one has to take concrete decisions. “In one sense choice is possible, but what is not possible is not to choose. I can always choose, but I ought to know that if I do not choose, I am still choosing” (Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* 41). Man has to choose because of his freedom. He does not have any guiding source before him so he is free to give value to any mode of living. “To say that we invent values means nothing else but this: life has no meaning a priori. Before you come alive, life is nothing; it’s up to you to give it meaning, and value is nothing else but the meaning that you choose” (Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* 49). Hence man is responsible for what he is, or more specifically, what he chooses to be.

But the absurdity of the situation is in the fact that man does not acknowledge his responsibility for what he is. He keeps on pretending to be someone else by assuming different roles. According to Sartre, all professions have a similar obligations imposed on them. There is the “ceremony” or “dance” of the grocer, the auctioneer, the tailor. The public demands of them that they undertake this ceremony in order to prove that they are nothing but a grocer, an auctioneer, a tailor (Palmer 84). In simple words, the *for-itself* always tries to shed his responsibility for what he is and also strives to lose his freedom. Sartre calls man an incomplete project. At this point the question arises: If man is an incomplete project and he is continuously striving for something, which goal, during the course of life, is he striving toward? Sartre’s answer to this question is:

The best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God. Whatever may be the myths and
rites of the religion considered, God is first ‘sensible to the heart’ of man as the one who identifies and defines him in his ultimate and fundamental project. If man possesses a pre-ontological comprehension of the being of God, it is not the great wonders of natures nor the power of society which have conferred it upon him. God, value and supreme end of transcendence, represents the permanent limit in terms of which man makes known to himself what he is. To be man means to reach toward being God. Or if you prefer, man fundamentally is the desire to be God. (Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* 63)

Sartre further asserts that to become God is not possible because the concept of God entails a self-contradiction. “The trouble is, nobody can become God, not even God” (Palmer 103). Sartre’s point is not to prove that God does not exist but to show that nothing will be changed if God does not exist. “We shall find ourselves with the same norms of honesty, progress and humanism, and we shall have made of God an outdated hypothesis which will peacefully die by itself” (Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* 22). For Sartre, God’s entity is of being-in-itself-for-itself. He is an in-itself in so far as the concept of the divine is complete and an existing entity. On the other hand, he is for-itself because he is completely free, possesses consciousness and not beholden to anyone else. Despite having consciousness, God is a complete entity. He has the capacity to objectify others without being objectified by them. God is outside the concept of despair and anguish which have been considered as the obligatory parts of being-for-itself. He holds the view that the prime motive of all humans (for-themselves) is to become God although it is impossible for them because as a conscious being one can not lose his freedom. Being-for-itself always strives to become being-in-itself and at the same time does not want to loose its consciousness and freedom which is an indispensable feature to become being-in-itself-for-itself (God). “If being-in-itself is always a fullness, being-for-itself is always an emptiness, an incompleteness. The human being is primarily a “desire,” and desire is a lack – an emptiness that hungers for fullness” (Palmer 102). Since desire can never be fully gratified, the project of for-itself to become in-itself can never be completed.

Though, to become God is an incomplete project, there are some attributes of human reality from which we can identify the continuous efforts of humans through
which they try to assimilate themselves to the image of God i.e. being-in-itself-for-itself. The first is—when a for-itself tries to behave like a thing, being-in-itself, though he is unable to negate his consciousness, by assuming different roles, behaving other than himself. In this condition the for-itself tries to show that he is not responsible for what he is doing. That he is not free to choose and it is his obligation to behave like a thing. The second attribute is—when one consciously tries to take that position from where he can objectify others without being objectified by them. The third is—when one consciously tries, though practically impossible, to avoid falling in despair and anguish. In all three attributes, the fundamental concern of being-for-itself remains to behave like a being-in-itself in which he ultimately fails because of his inability to lose consciousness.

Parsa is the only character in the novel in which the desire to become God can be felt more strongly than any other character. On many occasions in the novel, Parsa can be observed striving towards the completeness. Parsa, who strives to become perfect by adopting the role of a benefactor father and an ideal husband, is in an effort to become something— to become a thing in itself. After the death of his wife, Biro, Parsa chooses to bring his children up in the way Biro desired. He says to Pala:

How are we concerned about that? I am only interested in keeping the promise I made to biro. She always used to say, ‘take care, don’t ruin the lives of my children after I am gone.’ (22)

He pretends that he has no other choice except keeping the promise given to his wife Biro. Actually, he is free (to bring his children up or not according to the wish of his wife) to choose any way of living but does not want to take the responsibility of what he is doing. Actually this is his futile try to become a complete persona, where, he thinks that he is not free to choose things, instead bound by his responsibilities. He pretends to be nothing else but a benefactor of his children. Sartre says, “To choose to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose” (Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* 17). The promise which Parsa has given to his wife is valuable because Parsa freely chooses to give it a value. He is otherwise free to refute it anytime.
God, by virtue of its unchallenged position, always remains in the centre and in “looking” position by pushing all others to “being looked at” position. Under this effect, one, even if he is alone, remains conscious that he is being watched by God or he is being treated as an object by God. He loses his subjectivity in front of God because he is aware of his position which is continuously being objectified by God. God has the privilege to objectify others without being objectified by them. The desire to become God is therefore the desire to attain God-like subjectivity. The desire to become the controller of the situation is also the desire to become God in which one gets the privilege to treat others as objects without being objectified by them.

Throughout the novel, Parsa does not let him be objectified by the gaze of others because being the controller of the situation and having God-like subjectivity. He creates his own space outside the village where he can control things according to his own free-will. His two sons Jetha and Pohla do not feel happy with his decision of living in the fields but Parsa does not care for their objections a bit and does not even re-consider his decision. Parsa consistently behaves like a complete self (being-in-itself) and his gaze often reduces all other characters of the novel to the position of objects. His desire to remain constantly at the centre is his desire to have unquestioned subjectivity which only God can possess. He behaves like a hole to which all other characters lose their identity and drain into his world.

Parsa’s world is created through his own decisions and free-will. In his self-created world, there is no space for any kind of injustice. He contradicts all the notions which impose any kind of authority over his freedom. He does not allow tayî Bobi to wail upon the death of his wife Biro, Pandit Kashi Ram to break the earthen pitcher, Pandit Beli Ram to cook for him and Karma, his cousin, to do any formality. He affirms his position as the controller of the situation by treating all of them as objects. When Biro’s brother, Hardev, comes to console Parsa, he says:

Look at them! They think they are the only mourners! For six months when her bones were rattling against the manja, no one offered her drop of water and now they’ve come to flaunt the affection. (11)
Hardev, unable to confront Parsa’s subjectivity, fails to defend his position and leaves after some time.

This unchallenged subjectivity does not take Parsa away from humanity. Despite having a strong central position, his heart is full of love and care for Pala, Tindi, Basanta, and Meena. Without any strong reason, Parsa does not try to impose his strong subjectivity over others. When someone else tries to impose any kind of authority over him, he defends himself strongly. He even does not spare his friend Pala when he feels that he (Pala) is trying to act according to the established norms and not according to his own conscience. On an occasion, Pala tries to pacify Parsa by arguing why he (Parsa) should, being a Hindu, mind the chopping of his sons’ hair. He says, “Besides, such things are meant only for gursikhs. You are pandits. Why should kesh matter so much to you?” Parsa replies with an irony:

‘Well said! Well said raagiya! So much for you and your knowledge!’…. Parsa spoke as though he was demeaning the raagi. He broke into a cold sweat…. ‘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?’…. once again, the raagi felt he was no more than an ignoramus. He understood nothing, neither gurbani nor life….it appeared that once again he was compelled to acknowledge defeat to Parsa (51).

There is a difference between being God and the desire to become God. Since becoming God is not possible because of its self-contradictory position, the desire to become God contains all those characteristics which we assume necessary to fill the

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80 Sikhs made by guru himself. The word gursikh is made by joining two words: guru + sikh. Historically, the tenth Guru of Sikhs Shri Guru Gobind Singh prepared an army of Sikhs by giving them the training of arms. The army was directed to adopt five “K’s” as a sign of the member of the army. These five “K’s” were kesh (hair), kirpan (sword), kanga (comb), kada (a wrist band made of iron) and kachehra (a type of under-garment).

81 Hair
lack or incompleteness in human existence. Though final goal, i.e. to become God or to be complete, is never achieved, the strong desire to become God can win a for-itself superiority over other conscious fellow beings because it entails impenetrable subjectivity inspired by a strong sense of being the fountainhead of justice.

Maintaining the central position in the novel, Parsa consciously tries to keep himself away from anguish and despair. On many occasions in the discourse, he can be seen assimilating his mode of being with his bull Meena, a being-in-itself. When Meena bellows in aggression, Parsa says, “Well done! This sound is enough to rejuvenate a man like me, O my lion!... And when we grow old, we will die together. It’s a curse to be old! Neither you nor I will be able to cope with it.... We will leave this world while we’re still bellowing” (120). For Parsa, to grow old is to become weak which is not tolerable to him. We can not imagine Parsa as a weak man, being objectified by the gaze of the others. He never falls in the category of being-for-others because he does not let any kind of authority to determine his being. Throughout the novel he remains content and stable. He says to Pala:

If he lives inside me, then I am his personification. Why should I look for him? In that case, I’m God! (80)

**Basanta as a Rebel Hero**

Basanta is Parsa’s youngest son. In his childhood, he does not show any interest in studies as his two brothers do and prefers working in the fields with his father. Following the ways and manners of his father, he grows up with the qualities of bravery, stubbornness and stoicism. He is different from his other two brothers who prefer living sophisticated city-life after completing their formal education. Every inch of Basanta’s being is of an ordinary farmer who only knows eating well and working hard. In the matter of physical strength, nobody from his own village and from the near ones can dare stand parallel to him. Despite being born in a brahmin family, he, like his father, does not believe in “Puja-path, tilak or sacred thread, havan-yagna” (148). Instead, he worships truth, action and justice more dedicatedly than any religious scripture. It is quite amazing to note that many critics have so far discussed Parsa from
various points of view, but the character of Basanta has not picked their attention as seriously as it should have. And there is no exaggeration in saying that his personality has been overshadowed by the strong persona of Parsa. We find a few paragraphs dedicated to him in long critical essays and that too in the form of brief references in the context of the Naxalite movement which flourished in Punjab in 1970s. The point here is not to deny his involvement in the Naxalite movement but to explore those aspects of his personality which led him to join that movement. The purpose here is to see him as a potential “peasant rebel” and his journey from an ordinary peasant to an active member of the party.

There is very little difference, at least conceptually, between what Camus means by a rebel and what Eric Hobsbawm means by a social bandit because both fight against injustice and inhuman conditions. According to Hobsbawm, Bandits are those who “resist obedience, are outside the range of power, are potential exercisers of power themselves, and therefore potential rebels” (Hobsbawm 12). If we see deeply, Basanta possesses almost all these qualities and therefore is a potential rebel. Throughout the discourse, we can observe his spirit of resistance against any kind of obedience. In his childhood, he does not pay any heed to his school-master’s directions and even abandons going to the school after some time. The narrator describes his nature as: “Self-willed, Basanta often refused to listen to others, including the master” (26). He prefers being a farmer like his father which is definitely a suitable environment for his free spirit. He has a great physical strength and his interests are also those of a fighter. The master of the school once complaints Parsa as:

‘Panditji, the elder ones are quite bright. But this Chhottu [Basanta] doesn’t pay much attention. He is sharp, no doubt, but he doesn’t apply his mind to his studies. He appears to be more interested in picking up fights and squabbles wherever he can.’

(26)

According to Hobsbawm, if we want to look at the true nature and functioning of social banditry or of a rebellion, we must have to study the history of individuals or minority rebellions within peasant societies. According to him, those who snatch payrolls at an urban street corner to organize insurgents….are today apt to be
described, equally uncritically, as ‘terrorists’ (Hobsbawm 19). He further argues that social banditry is distinguished from two other kinds of rural crime: “from the activities of gangs drawn from the professional ‘underground’ or of more freebooters (‘common robbers’), and from communities for whom raiding is a part of the normal way of life, such as for instance the Bedouin. In both these cases victims and attackers are strangers and enemies. Underworld robbers and raiders regard the peasants as their prey and know them to be hostile; the robbed in turn regard the attackers as criminals as their sense of the term and not merely by official law. It would be unthinkable for a social bandit to snatch the peasants’ (though not the lords’) harvest in his own territory, or perhaps even elsewhere. Those who do, therefore lack the peculiar relationship which makes banditry ‘social’” (Hobsbawm 20).

Can everybody who resists obedience fit to be called a rebel or social bandit? The answer is: no. The major difference between rebels and other criminals is that they (rebels) are not regarded as simple criminals by public opinion. They are rather reformers, the restorer of “the traditional order of things as it should be” (Hobsbawm 30).

Basanta resists every kind of obedience from the beginning till the end of the novel. He does not listen to anybody including his father Parsa. When Parsa tells Basanta about Kalu’s complaint and chides him, he glowers:

> Why? Did I graze my cattle in chacha’s vineyard? He told me to pull Meena out of the fodder field. I said, ‘What’s your problem? If we desire, we can even dump cow-dung in our part of the field.’

Parsa pacifies Basanta and says:

> ‘But putra, he is your chacha, after all, and an old friend of mine. Even if he did say something, still you’re duty-bound to obey him.’

Basanta replies:

> ‘It’s none of my duty-shuty. I’ll do exactly what I please,’ turning his face away, Basanta rummaged through the fodder in Meena’s manger, rather idly. (37)

We can broadly divide the life of Basanta in two phases: his life before joining the Naxalite movement and after it. In the first phase, he is an ordinary farmer who
only knows about doing physical labour in his fields. He certainly does not have any particular ideology to follow. As an individual he is not political, neither he is aware of the complex relation between the exploiter and exploited. However, he has very simple and straight measures for what is right and what is wrong, and that too have been learnt from his father’s ideas about *karma-dharma*. Until Basanta comes in contact with the active members of the Naxalite movement in prison, he remains an ordinary peasant with the qualities of stoicism and never-to-submit attitude.

What makes him a real rebel is his sense of just and fair relations between two human beings. Anybody who does not keep his words, according to him, is on the wrong side and needs to be corrected. Gangi’s father had promised Parsa to marry his daughter to Basanta, but he does not keep his words and breaks the engagement without any information to Parsa. Basanta regards it an act of injustice and decides to “right the wrong” by becoming an agent of justice. Hobsbawm too opines, “Social bandits do, in the great majority of recorded cases, begin their career with some non-criminal dispute, affair of honour or as victims of what they and their neighbours feel to be injustice…. whatever the actual practice, there is no doubt that the bandit is considered an agent of justice, indeed a restorer of morality, and often considered himself as such” (Hobsbawm 49). In the cultural context of Punjab and according to the basic standards of dealing with each other within peasant society, what Gangi’s parents do is injustice because, according to the traditional Punjabi culture, the relations, especially in the context of marriage, are made on the basis of references given by friends, relatives, neighbours or acquaintances. Verbal promises keep great importance in fixing matches for marriages. Those who break the promises are considered wrong and according to the public opinion, the other party has the right to take action against them.

Basanta with his aggressive nature and never-to-submit attitude is no doubt a potential rebel. But there is a difference between being simply an agent of justice and choosing one’s career as a rebel. Choosing one’s career as a rebel means what Dostoevsky calls being in permanent state of rebellion. “One can only live in a permanent state of rebellion by pursuing it to the bitter end” (Camus, *The Rebel* 53).
However it is very difficult for a peasant to live in a permanent state of rebellion because in peasant societies rebellions generally occur in seasons. “The fields must be sown and harvested: even peasant rebellion must stop for the getting in of crops. The fences cannot be left too long unmended…. Only catastrophe… or the grave decision to emigrate, can interrupt the fixed cycle of farming life, but even the emigrant must soon settle down again on some other holding, unless he ceases to be a peasant” (Hobsbawm 34). Hence, to be a peasant on the one hand and being in a permanent state of rebellion on the other is a tough job and demands the grave decision from the one who decides to be a rebel. Only a man with exceptional courage and a very strong desire to correct what is wrong around him can take this decision. And there is no exaggeration in declaring that Basanta has the capacity to make that decision, no matter to which “bitter end” it may lead him. Basanta makes this decision during his stay in the prison. There he gets a chance to meet with the workers of the Naxalite movement. Basanta, politically naïve till he meets the members of the movement, immediately gets fascinated by the ideology that teaches him the real difference between “the Masters” and “the Slaves,” the exploiter and the exploited. The Naxalite movement, which flourished in Punjab during 1970s, believed in the use of force in its attempt to eliminate the gap between the rich and the poor, landlords and the landless farmers (who tilled the fields). This aggressive form of the movement was compatible to the style of living of Basanta and picks his frame of mind as immediately as he comes into contact with it.

Under the title “Who Becomes a Bandit?” Hobsbawm states that there are few categories from which there is a high probability for the recruitment of the rebels. The first category is the “rural surplus population” which contains too poor or landless labourers. The second category is that of marginal people which are usually not considered the integral part of society. The third and the most important category is of “individuals” or voluntary men.

Nevertheless, there is another category of potential bandits, in some ways the most important, membership of which is, as it were, individual and voluntary, though it may well overlap with the others. This consists of the men who are unwilling to accept the meek and passive social role of the subject peasant; the stiff-necked and
recalcitrant, the individual rebels. They are, in the classic familiar peasant phrase, the men who make themselves respected'.

There may not be many of them in ordinary peasant society, but there are always some. These are the men who, when faced with some act of injustice or persecution, do not yield meekly to force or social superiority, but take the path of resistance and outlawry.... They may also become the kind of outlaws about whom men sing ballads: champions, heroes and avengers. (Hobsbawm 40-41).

Camus calls these volunteers the individuals who cannot be tamed in any situation. Basanta positively belongs to this category because he is the one who desires to make himself respectable. He is wild, uncontrolled and aggressive by nature and at the same time the lover of justice, truth and freedom. Nothing has been imposed on him from the outside environment. Whatever he chooses, he chooses according to his own free will. His fearless nature and never-to-submit attitude is at once recognized by the active members of the movement and they willingly offer Basanta a respectable place in the party. Though a potential rebel up to this point, Basanta chooses rebellion as the sole purpose of his living and he is ready to accept its consequences as well, or in other words, he does not mind pursuing it to the “bitter end.”

The next important thing in the career of a rebel is his public dealing. No rebel can survive longer without the support of local populace. A rebel must be a popular figure among his own people who should consider him: fighting for the betterment of common populace. “It is only natural that the people’s champion should not only be, by local standards, honest and respectable, but entirely admirable” (Hobsbawm 54). A number of examples in this context can be given from over the world where people prey for the safety of the rebels. While being the champions of the common men, they themselves remain indistinguishable from them. Whether it is Robin Hood, Pancho Villa, Dulla Bhatti or Jeona Maur, they all helped the poor and helpless in their adverse situations or in their confrontation with the rich or the establishment.

I the scriptures have fulfilled,  
Though a wicked life I led  
When the naked I beheld  
I’ve clothed them and fed;
Sometime in a coat of winter’s pride,
Sometime in russet grey,
The naked I’ve clothed and the hungry I’ve fed,
And the rich I’ve sent empty away  (Harper 235)

In the matter of public relations, Basanta proves superior to his father. Even when he is wild and violent, we can observe his deep attachment to various characters in the novel. We do not observe that affection in Parsa with which Basanta longs to meet his friends Master Megh and Bhau. Let us see a conversation between Basanta and Master:

After the conversation when he was about to leave, Basanta said, ‘I’m also going to be released. Will you come to the village to look me up, sometimes?’
‘Sure, why not? Who else would I want to meet? You’re truly our precious diamond!’
‘Is that your word of honour?’
‘Oh yes! As firm as brick.’

Then the warmth with which the Master had pressed his hand and embraced him lingered for a long time; it was still cherished by him. That meeting Basanta had not been able to forget so far. He would very often wait for the Master. (158)

Though in many different ways, Basanta appears to us as Parsa’s own replica; however, speculating deeply, we find that he is different from his father in some respects. Parsa walks like an individual, alone and indifferent. His ways are no doubt heroic but we cannot imagine him working in a group. He is the one, in the words of Namha (an old villager), who has the courage to say, “I don’t want to get mixed up in any shady deals. For me, the only deal is the Truthful one” (205). Even when Parsa has good relations with Pala, Tindi and his own son Basanta, a peculiar kind of detachment can be noticed in his manner of living. He is a philanthropist of rare quality because he recognizes his duty towards mankind. On an occasion, he tells the purpose of human life to Manisha Nand as:

What it really means is that the way to moksha\textsuperscript{82} does not necessarily lie through the fulfillment of our desires or worldly goals. We have a duty or dharma even towards the

\textsuperscript{82} Salvation
fakir, the dejected, weak or helpless. Unless one understands that dharma, one remains as ignorant as ever. One even fails to do his dharma. (197)

But besides being a humanitarian, he is a detached being not only from his fellow beings but from his own misfortunes and sufferings. It is the point where Basanta is different from him. On many occasions we feel that Basanta is more socially active than him. He is attached with his surroundings and his life more deeply than his father. Basanta’s concern for Pala, Tulhi (the blacksmith of the village), Gangi, Tindi, Master Megh and Bhau\footnote{The word Bhau is mostly used for big brother in the Majha region of Punjab} corroborates his friendly nature. Though Tulhi is a friend of his father Parsa but he appears closer to Basanta. He makes a rare quality plough for Basanta for which some other farmers of the village picked up a quarrel with him. He treats him like his own son, makes a pistol for him and does not charge a penny for that. After getting the pistol from Tulhi, When Basanta asks its cost he says:

Tulhi scowled at him. He spoke, agitated ‘If someone else had told me a similar thing [to make a pistol], I would have slapped and turned him out of the house. And I wouldn’t have allowed him to cross my threshold ever. You’re like my son after all. So what should I say to you now. I don’t go around selling such ‘precious gifts.’ Now you’d better leave and not say a word. Do you get it? (74)

Basanta’s concern for Gangi, his fiancée, is so strong that in order to prevent her marriage with Master Kishan Chand, he attacks him and chops off his arm “with which he was to wield authority” (98). His love story in a way corresponds to the \textit{kissa}\footnote{Folk tale} of Mirza-Sahiban in which Sahiban elopes with Mirza because her parents were going to marry her against her wish with Tahar Khan of Chandhar family. Mirza, who was a skilled warrior and impeccable archer, while going away with Sahiban carelessly slept under a \textit{jand}\footnote{A type of jungle tree whose scientific name is \textit{prosopis} \textit{spicegara}} to take some rest. When Sahiban saw her brothers coming, she got wedged in dilemma between choosing her brothers and lover. She broke the arrows of Mirza thinking that she would convince her brothers not to kill Mirza. But her brothers did not listen to her and killed unarmed Mirza who before
dying fought very bravely against them. Since then Mirza is known for his bravery and
carelessness and often regarded as the greatest hero of Punjabi tragic romances. Gangi,
like Sahiban, sends a message to Basanta to take her away but he gets arrested by the
police just a night before when they were to execute their plan. Gangi reaches at the
appointed place but her brothers somehow get clue and follow her. They drag her
home, beat her and finally force her to drink a concoction of jimson weed. Due to her
good fortune she survives but soon after the incident she has a severe attack of
paralysis and consequently becomes a cripple for the whole life.

After attacking Master Kishan Chand, Basanta surrenders in the court. Parsa
thinks that they have taken their revenge for the wrong done against them. Parsa is not
interested in retaining any concern with Gangi thereafter. He says to Basanta, “What
are we to get out of Gangi now?...What is she to us anyway?.... Basanta sat bolt upright
almost as if someone had stabbed him in the chest.” He replies, “Do you know why she
has been reduced to this stage? And for whose sake did she have to become a cripple
for life?.... For my sake!.... And you say what do I want out of her.... what a thing to
say....” (211-12). In this context, one more incident needs to be concentrated. Before
surrendering in the court for attacking Master Kishan Chand, Basanta comes home at
night to meet Parsa. After narrating the story of his violent action, he tells his father
that he is going to surrender in the court at Sangrur. When he is about to leave his
house, he goes to Meena. Basanta says to Meena:

‘Oye, you need not to feel restless. After all, I have to attend to other things
as well – all the family chores. Understand!’

Meena bellowed as if nodding approval to whatever Basanta had said.

Parsa responses:

‘How can he squirm! So long as I’m with him, I won’t let him feel lonesome.
Otherwise also, he is a brave son of mine. He always remains in high spirits.’

‘But hapu, I might feel lonely without him.’ (99)

This conversation demonstrates Parsa’s emotional detachment from Meena.
Contrary to it, Basanta’s deep emotional attachment with Meena makes him sad when
he has to depart from him. This radical difference between the attitudes of Parsa and
Basanta demonstrates how intensely Basanta is attached with the persons related to him. It is not only that he is concerned with Gangi and Tulhi but almost similar kind of concern can also be observed in his relations with Master Megh, Bhau, his other friends of the party, Tindi, Hazoor’a’s son, Meena and so on. With these qualities Basanta – as a true rebel should be – soon becomes popular among his party members.

The final and indispensable phase in the life of a rebel is the execution of his plans. In the novel Parsa, we have not been given much detail about this phase of Basanta. The author has deliberately kept us away from the actions which Basanta must have accomplished behind the curtain. However, reading between the lines, we can get adequate information about the structural formation and workings of the members of the Naxalite movement. Master Megh and his friends come to meet Basanta in his fields three times, each time in the darkness of night and they generally leave Basanta’s house before dawn. Following the history of Punjab of the second half of twentieth century, we come to know that when open public meetings became impossible due to the loyalists or informers of the police, the workers of the Naxalite movement had to go to individuals through underground way. They often approached individuals at night and at a hidden place to encourage them to take part in this movement. Master Megh, in this novel, is a representative of such workers. He comes to meet Basanta because he knows about his courage and rebellious nature and Basanta who is ready to sway like a storm does not disappoint him.

To know the particular causes of Basanta’s rebellion and his involvement in the movement, it would be imperative if we briefly discuss the structure and objectives of the Naxalite movement in Punjab. The Naxalite movement in Punjab and almost all over the country was primarily agrarian in nature because the members of this movement were mainly middle class peasants or landless labourers. These suppressed peasants and landless labourers set armed struggle against the Biswedars and Landlords because the economic gap between them increased to such an extent that it had become impossible for the poor peasants and landless labourers to meet their daily needs. Two remarkable movements named Parja Mandal Movement and Muzara Movement ensured their agrarian nature and at the same time demonstrated the
implementation of the ideology of *dialectical materialism* in Punjab under the leadership of Red Communist Party. We would like to leave the historical development and the role of these sub-movements in the history of Punjab to the subject experts. Our main concern here is to demonstrate that these movements primarily utilized the cultural set up of the concept of heroism of Punjab against the suppressive regimes because its people (mainly the youths) have romantic notions about armed protests and revolutions. The cultural background, never-to-submit attitude to any authority and the belligerent nature of the people of Punjab made them compatible to the aims of the Naxalite movement. “These movements, besides being militant in nature, stood for the right of the tenant to the land that he tilled” (Singh, “Alienation and Twilight in Literary Discourse” 539).

Under the effect of the ideology of the Naxalite movement (which actually has been derived from Marx and Engels’ theory of *dialectical materialism*), Basanta consciously tries to reduce the gap between him and his farm-hand, Tindi. Basanta is a representative of middle class peasantry who voluntarily chooses to fight against the whole master/slave set up prevailed in the society. Tindi on the other hand belongs to the class of landless labourers- a dependant on Parsa and his family for his livelihood. Basanta dreams to make a classless society under the effect of the ideology of his party, and for this, he starts calling Tindi his brother- which means acknowledging him an equal partner of the land. He says to Tindi:

> No, we both will, ask each other… Now, don’t you talk like a stranger. You better remember now we’re together… real brothers, equal partners in everything we do….We’re actually equal partners- neither I’m your master nor you, my worker (169).

The organizational strategies used by Master Megh and his friends in the novel are of *Naujawan Bharat Sabha*. In 1970s, the youth Naxalite in Punjab proclaimed themselves to be the revolutionary descendants of Bhagat Singh and looked upon him as a kind of model for their movement. Therefore, they named their party after Bhagat Singh’s party which he had made in 1928. They, too, adopted the policy of attacking persons whose antecedents were politically unacceptable just as the way Bhagat Singh
had killed J. P. Saunders in 1928. This Naujwan Bharat Sabha followed the path shown by the freedom fighters and martyrs and therefore they considered the use of force and violence as the most suitable tool of their protest. In the novel, we have not been directly introduced to any such violent incident (especially after Basanta joins the Naxalite movement) consummated by him or his friends, however everything becomes apparent by the brief detail given to us by Hazooora. He says:

‘I knew him since the days he was in jail. My son was also with him. He too was arrested in the company of Naxalites. That’s where they became friends. After being released, he came to visit my son several times over, at our field’s kotha. He was no ordinary man. He was real son of a man!...... Bhagat Singh, Singh Sarabha, Udham Singh!

....

These that’re etched in colours shall parish

The ones engraved in stones shall parish,

But the fiery words that the burning hands inscribe in the air,

shall remain fragrant forever,

forever, forever, forever!’ (239)

The comparison which Hazooora draws between Basanta and the martyrs of the country, who had consummated significant violent actions during their fight for the freedom against British Government, automatically indicates that Basanta must have consummated similar violent actions during his career as a rebel. After considering all the details of the circumstances and the character of Basanta we can easily confer that he is a peasant rebel or a social bandit. He is not born to obey the orders of any authority but to live according to his own conscience. He is the one who fights to make himself respectable among his own people and dies to make his comrades proud of him.
Parsa as a Mythic Hero

Myths are the dynamic factors everywhere in human societies. They transcend time, uniting the past (traditional modes of being) with the present (current values) and reaching toward the future (spiritual and cultural aspirations) (Guerin 160). In his article “The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives,” William Bascom writes about myths as: “Tales believed as true, usually sacred, set in the distant past or other worlds or parts of the world, and with extra human, inhuman, or heroic characters” (Bascom 3). Therefore myths, though they belong to the distant past, play a significant role in creating our present and shaping our future. These myths are not formally taught to the people of a particular culture however the individuals spontaneously acquire them from their folk tales, literature and songs. Myths need not to be based on factual truthfulness or on any realistic imitation of its age. Instead, they are the stories of ancient times which are believed to be true by the people of a particular culture collectively. In other words, myths are the symbolic tales of the distant past which helped to preserve the values, belief systems and rituals of their respective cultures, continuously from one generation to the next.

The very title of the novel, Parsa indicates its mythic origin because it has been derived from the mythic character Parshurama- the sixth incarnation of the God Vishnu. Parsa has often been described in the novel as the descendant of Parashurama by the author. Gurdial Singh has used a multifaceted narrative technique in portraying Parsa’s character as a mythical hero. A number of direct references of Parshurama given in the text directly indicate that Parsa belongs to the lineage of Parashurama. Parsa himself says on an occasion:

We're brahmins, the descendants of Pasa Ram. For us, it's only a pick- axe, not a pen. That's for the Banias! Our ancestors always preferred to venture into the forests, and settle there. When we have nothing to do with the pen, why should we have any connection with the 'written word?' For the past seven generations we have been into farming- the devotees of Lord Shiva. We only know how to wreak havoc- not to construct or build (228).
While on the one hand the text is full with the direct references about Parsa belonging to the lineage of Parashurama, and on the other, his character metaphorically exhibits the rare combination of *shakti*\(^{86}\) and wisdom which is a typical eccentricity of Parshurama myth.

According to the myth, the real name of the sixth incarnation of Vishnu was Jamadgnya. He was born to father Jamadgni, a sage and reputed Brahmin, and mother Renuka. Jamadgni had a magical power to see beyond the boundaries of time and space. Jamadgnya was his fifth son. The first four sons of Jamadgni, as according to the expectations of his father and the tradition of the caste, were normal and studious Brahmans. They devoted most of their time in learning religious scriptures and doing *tapasaya* like his father. Jamadgnya deviated from the mode of being of his ancestors and brothers and developed an exceptional love for weapons during his childhood. Besides being a great learner of the holy texts, he was violent and vicious by temperament. He went off to the Himalayas to practice austerities and after a long time of *tappasya*, won the favour of the great God Shiva. Instead of asking for the knowledge of the universe and its creation, he asked for supreme mastery over weapons as his reward and Shiva blissfully granted it to him. His favourite weapon was the battle-axe and Shiva taught him how to use it so that he could become invincible. At that time, the battle-axe was also called *Parashu* and Jamadgnya, because of the dexterity in using it, came to be known as Parashurama (*parshu + rama*) thereafter.

Parashurama’s mother, Renuka was a *pativarta*\(^{87}\). In typical Hindu tradition, any *pativarta* is considered *apvitra*\(^{88}\) even if she thinks about another man as her playmate while her own husband is alive. Renuka had been bestowed many magical powers and due to the effect of those she did not even need a pot to bring water from the river. She just used to shape the flowing water into a pot-form and she could carry it home without any actual pot.

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\(^{86}\) Power  
\(^{87}\) A chaste, devoted and loyal wife  
\(^{88}\) Impure
One day, when she went to take water in the river, she saw the prince of Mrittikavati, Chiraratha, making love to his wives in the river. The sight of love making made her feel a bit envious as well as sorry for herself because such pleasures were not available to her. For a moment, she imagined herself enjoying those pleasures. Instantly, her magical powers deserted her and she could no longer form the water into a pot-form. Jamadgni, being a sage, knew what had happened and he was in one of his typical furious moods when she returned from the river. Parashurama too came to know that his mother had sinned. Jamadgni commanded all his sons to kill their mother. All other sons, being studious and speculative about the matter, did not act according to his father’s order. But Parashurama reacted swiftly and struck off his mother’s head with the single blow of his parashu without giving any second thought to the matter. His father asked him to receive a boon for obeying his order. Parashurama chose eternal life, invincibility in battle-field and his mother restored to life in her original purity as his boons and these were contentedly granted by his father (“Parashurama- The Angry Avatar of Vishnu” 3).

In another incident, a Kshatriya king, Kartavira, forcibly took away the cow Surabhi (Kamdhenu) from the aashram of Parashurama’s father Jamadgni. Parashurama, in anger, pursued him and in the battle killed him. The sons of Kartavira killed Jamadgni, the father of Parashurama, in a revenge for their father’s murder. After his father’s murder, Parashurama vowed vengeance against them and the whole Kshatriya race. It is believed that he filled up seven lakes with the blood of his enemies. He is said to have fought and cleared the earth of Kshatriyas in twenty-one bloody battles. It is also believed that the present Kshatriya race, after Parashurama

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89 Kashtriya meaning warrior is one of the four castes (social orders) in Hinduism which is above the vaishias and below the brahmins. The traditional function of the caste was to protect society by fighting in wartime and governing in peacetime.

90 In Hindu mythology, Kamdhenu is a celestial cow that grants all desires. The word has been derived from uniting two words: Kama (wish) and dhenu (cow). Hence kamdhenu is a wish-cow which can give her owner whatever he desires.

91 Aashram is a hermitage, monastic community or any other place where seekers meet, presumably for instruction, under the patronage of an auspicious guru.
had killed them all, is the outcome of Brahmins, i.e. their offspring were born to Kshatriya mothers and Brahmin fathers. It is mentioned in the *Mahabharata* that Parashurama was deprived of his *parashu* and strength by Rama Chandra- the seventh and the most celebrated incarnation of Vishnu (Kohli 128).

Parashurama was without any doubt a rebel hero who took the first courageous step to break the traditional way of living of Brahmins. Since that time, Parashurama myth has been symbolizing the blend of *shakti* and wisdom. It is because of this blend of *shakti* and wisdom that Parsa, the protagonist of the novel, resembles with Parashurama and proudly designates himself as his descendant. By birth Parsa is a Brahmin, and according to the tradition of the caste, he should be a learner of the holy texts. The traditional onus of the caste system does not allow a Brahmin to choose his life full of actions. Instead, a Brahmin must be a source of wisdom for other caste people. He should be the one who possesses all the knowledge about the secret of getting *Moksha* and the eternal life. Therefore, it is not expected from a Brahmin to have aggressive temperament or to indulge into a hard physical labour. But Parsa, like Parashurama, refutes following the traditional path of his caste and adopts another path which derives him towards doing hard physical labour and the world of action. His strong, rough and aggressive persona differentiates him from the traditional conceptualization of what a Brahmin ought to be. Basanta corroborates this world of action as:

*All these calculations… are fit only for mahajans*.\(^{92}\). Do we, the illiterate *Jats* or the *brahmin-Jats*, ever weigh anything before we go ahead?.... a *jat* comes into the world only to tear off the account books. These *banias*\(^{93}\) reduce their entire life to a few blotchy letters in an account book. How can a *jat* be compared to them? (211)

In this novel, the author seems to be focusing on describing the difference between *brahmins* and *jat-brahmins*. Pondering over the history of Jats, Irfan Habib confers that *Jats* were first noticed in the seventh century as a pastoral community which had no masters. It was during the eleventh century to sixteenth century that a

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\(^{92}\) Money lenders (A sub-caste of Hindus)

\(^{93}\) Businessmen or shopkeepers
remarkable shift from pastoralism to agriculture was noticed in their profession. In the historical development, agriculture has become so intensely attached with Jats that in the region between The Sindh and The Ganges they can metaphorically be used for each other. Parsa belongs to the lineage of jat-brahmins which denotes that his ancestors, despite being born in a brahmin family, have chosen to be agriculturalists. In this context, let us observe a brief conversation between the master of the school and Parsa:

‘Devta-ji, your ancestors have spread the light of knowledge for as long as one can remember. How can you say this about your son? There’s no comparison between education and farming. Farming is meant only for those who are tough and rugged. Only those who can’t manage otherwise or are duds opt for it!’

Parsa broke into laughter. ‘Masterji, our ancestors were also like us. Don’t have any illusions about this. The pandits who either taught, learnt or had sound knowledge of Vedas, were all from Banaras or other neighbouring towns. Our ancestors barely managed to learn a few mantras by heart so that they could tide over the rituals like pheras. Beyond this, they knew little…. Now tell me – would you call me a scholar of Vedas or a jat? Besides, there is nothing demeaning about farming. Even the Gods salute those who work on the land. Masterji, land is the most precious of all worldly possessions in the Brahmanda. So don’t think poorly of farming. (27)

Parsa’s ancestors chose to be peasants because it suited best to their aggressive and coarse temperament. Pondering over the holy texts and leading the life of austerity did not attract Parsa’s lineage and therefore they preferred toiling hard on the fields. They rejected the passive mode of living of a tapasavi in favour of the world of action and physical activities. Akin to his forefathers, Parsa too does not like the traditional rituals and customs of his caste and contradicts them wherever he gets any opportunity. According to him, these rituals and customs are shallow and do not have any value in actual circumstances of a peasant. He believes that the only possible way

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94 Spiritual instructions mentioned in ancient Vedas.
95 Moving round the sacred fire or holy book at the time of wedding.
96 Universe
97 Ascetic
through which a human being can assign meaning to his existence is the way of action. Therefore in spite of following any religious norms, he prefers the ideology of *karma-dharma*. According to this ideology, any action (*karma*) or decision made by an individual for the benefit of “the dejected, weak or helpless” turns out to be his real *dharma*. Parsa does not imagine God outside the dimensions of humanity. Therefore, the prime motive of a man’s life, for him, is the “service of mankind because man alone is the personification of *brahma* (193).” If a person does his *karma* honestly and dedicatedly, he need not follow the shabby rituals imposed on him by any religion or society. His *karmas* eventually become his *dharma* when they are done for the betterment of someone. On an occasion he argues with Pala on this matter as:

> *Raagiya*, faith is another name of *dharma*. And *dharma* is the other face of *karma*. Can you conceive a man without his *karma*?…. *Dharma* should be weighed against falsehood. And the only substitute for falsehood is truth. So, *dharma* is another word for truth. *Karma* is, I say, the highest form of *dharma* (25).

For Parsa, *karma* (action) is related to *dharma* (religion) through *kartavya* (duty, obligation) and it is only an individual who can decide which form of *karma* should he chose so that it would become his *dharma*. Because “*dharma* should be weighed against falsehood,” therefore it is our duty to stand against injustice and falsehood.

According to the philosophy of Parsa, the meaning and mode of actions (*karmas*) can be different for each individual. Hence “the meaning of *dharma*, too, changes according to time and circumstances…. This is something that only a man’s inner conscious can decide” (25). Parsa narrates an anecdote to Tindi to substantiate this idea of individual perception of one’s *karma* and *dharma*. According to the story, there was a king Ambisar of the empire Mithandeep. The king was a religious man and he never sent a *sadhu* or *fakir* empty-handed from his palace. Once a *sadhu* came and demanded a bowl of grain. The king asked his store-keeper to give the same. When the store-keeper began to fill the bowl, he ran out of stock but the bowl was still empty. The *sadhu* had magical powers and he gave the king three option: “either you fill the bowl with grain. Or be prepared to face a continuous spell of rain for seven-and-a-half
otherwise, you have to endure a seven-and-a-half years of drought” (242-43). The king opted for the last and after two years king’s store was depleted. The king’s ministers suggested that they should seek the help of the king Manisar who would let them stay there till the adversity is over. The king Ambisar asked his subjects to move to the land of Manisar. One Brahmin refused to move and make the king realize that he should not seek help of the other king because no king can ever be a friend of another king. Manisar might take advantage of the crisis and declare war against them. So instead of seeking help from Manisar, the Ambisar should attack him first.

This is what the real politics says. And a wise king is one who, anticipating trouble, takes the initiative to launch an offensive against his enemy so as to decimate his power. Yes, you also mentioned something regarding inflicting atrocities upon the people. Remember, so long as the phase of satyuga\textsuperscript{99} doesn’t return, subjects of one king or another will continue to be ground in the millstone of oppression. Right now your subjects are in terrible distress. Always attend to the problems of your own subjects. Don’t even think about the misery of another king’s subjects. You should first bother about those people for whom you’re responsible. Do your duty towards them. Fulfil the dictates of your dharma. The first and foremost dharma of a king is to protect and ensure the means of livelihood to his subjects. (245)

Following the advice of the Brahmin, the king attacked Manisar and became victorious. The crisis was over with the wealth and the grain obtained from Manisar after victory. In this way, Parsa tries to make Tindi understand that sometimes one has to cross boundaries drawn by moral standards to fulfil one’s dharma. Morally, what Ambisar did seems wrong because he attacked the other king, who might have helped them generously without taking advantage of their adversity, devoid of any enmity or antagonism. Attacking someone purely on the basis of anticipation (that another might attack first) cannot be legitimized and therefore can fairly be taken as an act of injustice. The ideological similarity can also be noticed in the act of Parashurama too.

\textsuperscript{98}One eighth duration of the day i.e. three hours make one pahar. It is the traditional way to measure the time-duration.

\textsuperscript{99}Indian conception of utopian society which would be prevailed on the conception of truth.
when he declared war against all Kshatriyas just on the basis that one Kshatriya king had murdered his father. He might have killed many innocent Kshatriyas in his mission to clear earth from the whole Kshatriya race. Parsa who talks about justice and truthfulness from the beginning to the end of the novel here seems to be self-contradicting his ideas by justifying the act of Ambisar. But in order to understand Parsa’s real spirit behind his favour of Ambisar, we need to speculate the real difference between seeking help from the other king and attacking him.

After analyzing the ideology and the way of living of Parsa, we can unambiguously confer that he believes that being in action for fulfilling one’s dharma is better than passively seeking someone’s obligation at the sake of losing one’s self-respect and masterly position. Moreover, according to him one’s dharma depends on the individual perception through which he decides his kartavya. To decide what is right or wrong in particular situation is sometimes, at least in post-modern era, a very complex matter and depends on our value system, i.e. to select one thing over another and bestow value to it. But according to Sartre, “being-in-itself (reality as it is prior to any human intervention in it) has no meaning and no value…. Meaning and value happen in the space between being-for-itself (conscious experience) and being-in-itself. Therefore we humans are the creators of our world- of our situation” (Palmer 100). Logic alone sometimes cannot tell us what we ought to do in a particular situation. Sartre explains this point with a famous example of a student of his who came to him during the German occupation of France in World War II. The young man’s older brother had been killed in an early battle and his father had become a collaborator. His mother, in despair over the brother’s death and her husband’s treason, depended totally on her remaining son for moral support. The student was torn between his love for his mother and his loyalty to France (which included a desire for revenge against the Germans). He was torn between two kinds of ethics, one that put him in solidarity with the Free French forces preparing to join in the invasion of German-occupied Europe, and one that unified him with a single needy individual whom he loved. The first was more momentous, but abstract and less certain of success, the second more concrete but also perhaps more cowardly…. But both acts seem to be valid models of behaviour. In either case there will be anguish, but also the creation of the world
(Palmer 118-20). He can choose any way out of the two and claims to be sensible in his selection. Therefore it depends on an individual perception which way he should select to fulfill his dharma. King Ambisar is caught in similar situation. His prime motive was to ensure the livelihood of his subjects. For this, he could either seek the help of Manisar, the neighboured king, or attack him to loot grain and wealth for his subjects. Both acts were valid for different aspects. However, he chose the latter, i.e. the mode of action because it was more heroic and full of self-respect. Parsa appreciates the act of Ambisar because he himself criticizes the passive mode of living and favours the world of action like Parashurama.

During his stay in Haridwar, Parsa comes into contact with Sant Narang Das and his disciple Manisha Nand. Parsa goes there to seek spiritual augmentation of his understanding of the world. But when he observes the mode of living of Sant Narang Das and Manisha Nand he strongly disapproves it on the basis of its passiveness. According to him, the greatest form of being a human is his capacity to be in action. Those who escape from the realities of the world can never achieve the full meaning of his being. He considers the dera of Sant Narang Das no better than a cage, and the sant himself, a hypocrite caught in the web of illusions.

Parsa found nothing more than conventional wisdom in his [the sant's] words. He had heard Pala Singh talk of things more profound. He was not impressed with the wisdom of the sant. Then how come he had managed to create such an illusory world? Not that he appeared much of a devotee either. Could one sustain such an illusion through sheer hypocrisy? (177)

According to Parsa, living the life of austerity in the forests is a passive and much easier way of living which only a coward can adopt. It is just like taking refuge from one’s responsibilities and freedom of choices. Parsa narrates a symbolic story to Sant Narang Das in this context. In this short story, he symbolically talks about “desire” and “freedom” and an unavoidable relation between the two. The Agni-bird symbolizes the blend of desire and freedom. Like Agni-bird, desire never descends at the same place twice. If it alights at a certain point, it never comes back again. The desire does not get satisfied after getting its object, rather, it moves to another object.
Therefore, the desire can never be satisfied. The Agni-bird symbolizes the desires of the individuals and Sant Narang Das symbolizes the hunter who wants to capture and control the Agni-bird, or symbolically, to control the desires of the individuals who come to his Dera. Parsa, through this story, symbolically points to Sant Narang Das that- to live a passive life in a Dera is to negate the reality; and for Parsa, there is no reality except being in action. Hence, like the queen, all the efforts of the sant become futile to bring his desires under control. Parsa says, “Santji, you still haven’t gained self-control. What have you grasped in so many years?” (195). Living the life of an ascetic in the dera cannot provide him with the meaning that he is seeking for the completeness of his being.

The mode of existence of Agni-bird also symbolizes the importance of freedom in the life of an individual and the responsibilities associated with it. Agni-bird, in this novel, says to the hunter, “You’re ready to commit the great sin of depriving me of the freedom I have enjoyed for centuries (187)?” Agni-bird is like a free individual who lives in the real world and faces challenges and hardships of life rather than taking refuge in a distant place like the sant. Through this story Parsa gives a hidden message to Sant Narang Das that the knowledge of the creation of the universe and secrets of being cannot be acquired through living a life of an ascetic, enclosing oneself into the boundaries of a dera to avoid being in action. For it, one needs to be free from any kind of pretence and austerity and should fly like the Agni-bird in the open sky without any fear and worry about the uncertain future. Parsa says:

But the one who roams freely across the skies, is born as a bird, an Agni-bird, one who always burns inside, but spreads the glow of light all around (187).

By roaming freely, the Agni-bird asserts its right of freedom and its conviction in the spirit of being in action. When Sant Narang Das’s disciple Manisha Nand asks Parsa the real meaning and purpose of human life, he ironically answers him: “…you’d better ask your Guru– the one who made you barter away this priceless, diamond-like life for potsherds” (197). Living a life without being in action in a dera according to Parsa is a waste of priceless human life. The lives of those who choose to live in a refuge are a waste because there is a lack of spirit of being in action, which constitute
the existences of Parsa and his son Basanta. Analysing it in mythic context, we find that this is the spirit of being in action and his courage to accept difficult challenges that differentiate Parashurama from all other avatars\textsuperscript{100} of Vishnu.

Another mythical reference which draws our attention recurrently in the discourse is the practice of Niyoga. The practice of Niyoga has a great traditional value in Hinduism. According to the traditional beliefs in Hinduism, all men come into this world burdened by a debt- the pitr-run\textsuperscript{a} (pitr= ancestor; runa= debt). The only way to repay this debt is to father a male offspring. During funerary rites, known as sharadha\textsuperscript{101}, Hindu males are still reminded of this debt of his ancestors. In the Dharamshashtras, it is said that those who fail to repay this debt end up in the hell known as put where they suffer eternally. Because the birth of a child, preferably male-child, liberates a man from this debt, the Sanskrit word for son is putra (derived from put).

Niyoga thus is an ancient Hindu tradition, according to which, a woman (whose husband is either incapable of fatherhood or has died without having a child) requests and appoints a person for helping her bear a child. The appointed man should most likely be a rishi or a revered person. The act should be considered that of dharma and while doing so, the man and the wife should have only dharma in their mind and not passion nor lust. The man does it as a help to the woman in the name of God, whereas the woman accepts it only to bear a child for herself and her husband. The most famous example of Niyoga in Hindu mythology occurs in the Mahabharata. Dritarashtra, Pandu and Vidhura were the three children born out of this practice when rishi Vedavyasa was the appointed man. Later Pandu himself was incapable of producing children and the five Pandavas, Yudhishthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva were born out of Niyoga, the respective biological fathers being various Devas (“Niyoga”).

\textsuperscript{100} Incarnations
\textsuperscript{101} A Hindu rite of offering food to Brahmins
When we analyse the incidents of the second half of the novel in the background of this Hindu tradition, we observe that Parsa partakes in the practice of *Niyoga* through his relationship with Mukhtiar kaur. During his visit at the *dera* in Haridwar, he meets Mukhtiar Kaur whose husband, Ghula Singh, had been ill for several years and, according to Sant Narang Das, “much before that he was impotent as well” (185). Therefore, Ghula Singh was incapable of fathering a child and died without siring an offspring. After the death of her husband, Mukhtiar Kaur takes initiative and makes physical bond with Parsa and becomes pregnant. But in the course of giving birth to the child, she dies. But before dying she calls Parsa to her home and symbolically hints him to take the responsibility of her household and property because he only is the real master of that. After her death, Sant Narang Das calls Parsa to accept his child and he contentedly accepts it with his sense of responsibility.

Anybody can unambiguously notice the practice of *Niyoga* in the relation between Parsa and Mukhtiar Kaur. This relationship is not governed by physical desires but by the sense of responsibility which Parsa assumes is the prime responsibility of one human towards another. Parsa makes physical relations with Mukhtiar Kaur not for his physical needs but for his sense of responsibility towards a needy. Mukhtiar Kaur, on the other hand, is in dire need of a child to complete her motherhood. She describes her state of mind as:

> Somehow my mind is very restless. I can't find peace anywhere, either at home or outside. So finally I just started off, hoping that the *sants* might shower their blessing and help me regain my peace of mind somewhat (184).

But the thing that needs to be noticed is the position of Parsa in this relation. According to the Hindu tradition, the one whom a woman selects to bear a child should be particularly of a high rank. This implies that he may be a *rishi*, sagacious person, *devta*, demi-God, superior being or hero. Here that position is bestowed to Parsa by Mukhtiar Kaur. It is her selection of Parsa that makes him more significant even than that of the head of the *dera* himself. She finds Parsa the most suitable man to compete the obligations of her motherhood.
Therefore, as the narrative develops through symbols, metaphors and images, Parsa emerges as a modern facsimile of these two mythical contexts, i.e. the myth of Parashurama and the practice of Niyoga. In his ways, manner and conduct, we can find the surfacing of a new kind of “ism” that is Parashuism (which certainly has been developed from the mode of living of the mythic character Parashurama). This Parashuism gives him an exceptional strength to accept difficult challenges in life and remain indifferent and stoic in problematic situations. It also bequeaths him a unique combination of wisdom and the use of shakti while doing his karma. It is because of this unique combination that Parsa becomes able to assert his superiority over his fellow beings. The selection of Parsa by Mukhtiar Kaur to fulfil his incomplete motherhood (the practice of Niyoga) really ranks him higher than the much learned sant of the dera. Having all these characteristics, he turns out to be a contemporary hero whose background is prepared by many mythical, cultural, existential and ideological elements.