Chapter VI

Conclusion

After analysing Gurdial Singh’s four novels (*The Last Flicker, The Survivors, Night of the Half Moon* and *Parsa*), we can confidently infer that he certainly has created some immortal characters in the world of Indian fiction such as Jagseer, Bishna, Daya Kaur, Modan, and Parsa. This is only possible when a writer has a deep insight into the human life in general and in the context of the lives of his characters in particular. These characters are attached to the ground realities of the culture they are part of. Therefore, they often seem to be serving as the metaphors of Punjabi culture and its life-style.

After discussing these characters in detail in the previous chapters, the common thing that we notice in almost all the characters is their particular behaviour. They all possess a spirit of resistance which binds them together to a single theme. And this is the spirit which differentiates them from their fellow beings and inspires them to adopt a “higher way of holding oneself.” We observe that the conditions of existence of Jagseer, Bishna, Modan and Parsa are different and they have their own problematic circumstances. However, their reaction towards these circumstances is more or less the same. They do not accept the conditions of their existence as they are offered to them by the establishment or any other “repressive structure.” Something inside them does not allow them to accept the oppression passively. While rebelling against the establishment or any other authority, the conceptualization of justice remains at the center. The characters might not be aware of any philosophical explanation or implication of the concept of justice, but for them, justice simply means that every human on this earth is equal and should be treated equally in every aspect of life. Inequality, for them, is the most strenuous act of unjust which should come to an end. Rebelling against the acts of injustice, they present themselves as the fountainheads of justice. They do not seek any divine assistance to help them in getting justice for them. They prefer to take command in their own hands and fights against injustice alone, essentially as individuals. The manner of their resistance might be different. For
instance, Jagseer projects his anger on his own body, stops working as a seeri for Bhanta and starts taking opium; Daya Kaur makes an image of Thola in her courtyard in the form of a scarecrow and projects her anger by beating it; Bishna resists to leave his ancestral house, refuses to take compensation for his lost house and refutes the offer to live in hata given by his brother as a favour; Modan kills Ghana and refuses to take water from his enemies’ tubewell; Parsa refuses to obey any social customs which he thinks are meaningless and resists to live a sophisticated city life according to his sons.

Even though Jagseer, Bishna, Daya Kaur, Modan and Parsa are rebellious, and sometimes aggressive too, they, on the other hand, are full of love and compassion for those who are honest, truthful and unpretentious. One cannot forget Jagseer’s genuine concern for his friend Raunki; Daya Kaur’s irresistible love for Kala and Maghi and her motherly treatment to Buta and Budha; Bishna’s affection for Hetiya and Kaniya and his friendship with Rama Akāli, Modan’s love for Bhani and his comradeship with Ruldu; Parsa’s care for Pala Raagi, Tulhi, Basanta and his bull Meena. Let us observe an example from The Survivours in which Daya Kaur’s love for Kala and Maghi has been manifested:

It had nearly been two years when, on the pretext of going to the Baisakhi fair, they [Kala and Maghi] had come to meet her. Daya Kaur still remembered how she had sat with both of them cuddled up in her lap, the reinvigorating warmth of their breath enveloping her. But now she often agonised over the fact that even if she were to set her eyes upon them, she wouldn’t be able to recognize their youthful faces. Daya Kaur felt as though god had heaped all the curses on her head! (192)

These qualities of the protagonists of Gurdial Singh, i.e. rebelling or standing against the establishment or morally wicked persons on the one hand and loving and supporting the helpless on the other, bring them close to the conceptualisation of heroism. Their behaviour and actions often seem to be reverberating the rebellious attitude of the legendary heroes of Punjab. However, it is equally significant to note that the rebellion of these characters remain at the metaphysical level only. There is no doubt about the fact that these characters rebel against what they think is injustice and unethical but this rebellion remains more or less limited to their ideas. They often fail
to turn their thoughts to practical actions and therefore their resistance sometimes gives the impression that it is the resentment of individuals who are fighting for their personal causes. In actual, the causes and issues raised by Gurdial Singh in these novels are not particular to any individual. An individual only represents a bigger class in which many individuals like him generally have such experiences in different situations of their lives.

Jagseer in *The Last Flicker* is a seeri who is mistreated by his master Bhanta. Bhanta snatches away the piece of land which was given to his (Jagseer’s) father by his grandfather. Dharam Singh’s wife and the wife of Bhanta both insult Jagseer and call him a low caste. Jagseer does not accept his position in society as an inferior being. Many a time in the novel, he thinks of rebelling against his master overtly. But instead of projecting his anger on his master, he projects it against himself. It is possible that he might have been, though unconsciously, aware of the futility of his struggle against the establishment and therefore he drops the idea of direct confrontation. But on conscious level, he without any doubt declares war against himself. He starts taking drugs which affect his health. He thinks that the actions of injustice should come to an end but practically fails to convert his ideas into actions. Jagseer rebels against his subjugated condition but his rebellion does not lead him towards any concrete action.

Bishna and Daya Kaur, in *The Survivors*, rebel against the establishment because they have been forcibly thrown out of their ancestral house. For them, it is not the matter of their house only. Daya Kaur says to Budha on one occasion:

‘Were we born with this house? Houses can be made wherever people drop anchor. Why be so attached to the soil?’ (164)

It is not the matter of their house, a piece of land, the property that disturbs Bishna and Daya Kaur but they think it as an attack on their freedom, self-respect and dignity. If it had only been the matter of property, Bishna would have accepted the offer of the government official in which he asks Bishna to take compensation for his lost house in a new built colony near his house. But Bishna refuses the offer bluntly because according to him one’s self-esteem cannot be compensated with a piece of land.
Though Bishna does not have any personal grudges against Gokal Chand and Shiv Ram but he cannot tolerate them standing with the exploiters. He knows that they have collected money by sucking the blood of the poor people and on the basis of their sound economic conditions, they have made a special place in the establishment. Walking in a street, when he looks at havelis, he says, “The mortar in these bricks is nothing but blood, yes blood!” (130). Bishna’s rebellion against these people is based on a value system according to which property and economic prosperity have secondary status in a human’s life. The primary concern, according to him, of a human being is to live with essential human dignity and pride.

This is for his right to freedom and self-esteem that he decides to fight against the establishment. On an occasion he projects his anger on Thola in this way:

While wiping his feet, Bishna first spat out an abuse and choking with anger, said, ‘If I don’t avenge each and every act of these sons of a bitch, who would ever call me Bishna!’

As he kept rubbing his short and rough feet, Daya Kaur could hear the sound of his gritting teeth. He burst out, ‘Bloody dog! You think you can get away with it… Just wait and see how I suck your blood with a pivot …! (88)

Later in the novel, Daya Kaur asks Bishna what he is making:

Bishna neither spoke nor looked at Daya Kaur. Then with all his might, he brought the axe down once again. ‘I’ll use these pegs to rummage through Toti’s ashes! (154)

In these expressions, Bishna appears aggressive and full of rage. He, without caring for the consequences, is ready to confront the representatives of establishment like Toti, Thola and Gokal. Many a time he vows to kill those who cause injustice on the earth. However, his plans and aspirations are not practically executed in the novel.

In Night of the Half Moon, Modan gets success in executing his plans. He heroically kills Ghana because his (Ghana’s) unethical tricks had taken the life of his innocent father Pala. The ideology of legendary heroes of Punjab seems standing behind the action of Modan. He avenges the death of his father just as the way Jeona had avenged on Dogar because of his deception.
After returning from the jail, Modan feels sorrow to observe the changes that have occurred during his absence. He is completely unable to understand the transforming social structure which is primarily being dominated by the economic factors. The conceptualization of heroism in the background of his conscience does not let him accept this new social scenario. His own brothers have compromised with the situation and they do not mind developing friendly relations with the sons of Ghana for some economic benefits. But Modan resists against this attitude of his brothers and prefers living alone at his house outside the village. Along with his friend Ruldu, he keeps on criticising the ways and manners of the sons of Ghana through which they try to influence others.

Modan rebels against this new economically-dominated world which he thinks is the world of injustice and immorality. His attack on the sons of Ghana at the end of the novel symbolizes his attack on the representatives, though his own brother is included in them, of this new world. In the scuffle, he himself gets a fatal wound and dies afterwards. His dream to end the world of injustice is carried on by his friend Ruldu.

Parsa’s resistance against the dominant social order is more subtle and can only be understood through different symbols. For example, his fight against his son over the matter of chopping of his hair is not the issue of religion but the lack of the inner strength of his son to stand against the establishment. When Pohla again grows his hair long, Parsa calls it “herd-mentality” (119). Parsa says:

‘What hurts me is that the first time you got your milk-butter conditioned hair chopped just because others were doing so. You have grown them now for much the same reason. This is what I call herd-mentality. God has given man the power to think and decide for himself. After all, men are not a flock of sheep, Pohla Singha?.... Now I tell you why you decided to grow your hair. You are going to be a junior thanedar. You’re scared of being called a babu. You’d prefer to be known as ‘Sardar Sahib’. That explains your new ‘avataar’’. (118-119)

His affection with his youngest son Basanta and his aloofness from Jetha and Pohla is the result of a particular ideology. Under the influence of this ideology, he values personal dignity, compassion for the needy, fair-play in every facet of life etc.
as the primary attributes of an individual. He believes, at least on conceptual level, that
the use of power or violence to prevent an act of injustice is favourable to mankind. He
is opposite to any kind of pretentious behaviour, greed for money or shallow social
customs whose primary aim, according to him, is to impose certain limitations on the
freedom of an individual. He believes, like the mythic character Parashurama, that the
primary dharma (duty) of a being is to do his karma (action) for the establishment of a
world based on justice and truthfulness. For this cause, he does not even mind the
decision of his dearest son to sacrifice his life.

The common thing that we notice in the behaviour of these characters is their
failure in turning their ideas into actions. At ideological level, they severely attack
those notions and actions which propound the validation of the power of the state or
establishment. But when it comes to the matter of actions, they fall short of their ideas.
They fight against the power structures at ideological level and that too as individuals.
We hardly notice any hope of turning their rebellion into a revolution. This might be
the cause of their politically naïve attitude. However, despite being aware of the fact
that there are many other people like them who experience similar anguish against the
establishment, they fail to formulate and work in a group. Their struggle against the
conceptualization of injustice is undeniably significant but it lacks the combination of
rebellious ideas and concrete actions.

Recapitulating the whole situation in the background of the world created by
Gurdial Singh in The Last Flicker, The Survivors, Night of the Half Moon and Parsa,
we can allege that these characters, i.e., Jagseer, Bishna, Daya Kaur, Modan and Parsa
successfully keep the tradition of resistance and rebellion of the legendary heroes of
Punjab. The only difference between the legendary heroes and these characters is that
the legendaries heroes execute their plans and their actions lead them to concrete
results. They resist and rebel against their conditions of existence and it is manifested
in their actions. But on the other hand, in the protagonists of Gurdial Singh, the attitude
of resistance and rebellion exists at conceptual level. They, no doubt, refuse to accept
the oppressive conditions of their existence but their refusal is not strongly manifested
in their practical actions. They share a common space with the legendary heroes of
Punjab at ideological level. They are, without any doubt, the rebels but the nature of their rebellion is metaphysical.