Chapter III

*The Survivors: A Narrative of Resistance*

*The Survivors (Unhoye)*, published in 1966, was Gurdial Singh’s second novel and has been considered as one of the best novels of Punjabi literature by various distinguished critics. Gurdial Singh proves a craftsman par excellence when he narrates the stories of common people, simultaneously reflecting on the deep philosophical ideas of human existence. In this novel, he epitomizes his skills of blending crude reality with imagination. Nowhere in the narrative have the characters lost their attachment with the environment they are living in. After having a comprehensive understanding of the novel, with its surface and deep meanings intact, one can easily be convinced that the novel possesses rich multidimensionality as far as its thematic and mediating levels are concerned. In this way, though tactfully, the discourse of the novel has enhanced the responsibility of the readers to understand its multifarious complexities by viewing it from different perspectives.

According to the narrative of the novel, Bishna has been depicted as a middle aged man who lives with his wife Daya Kaur and younger brother Bhagta at his ancestral house which is located on the outskirts of mandi. Daya Kaur had given birth to five children but no one survived out of them. Both Bishna and Daya Kaur had brought up Bhagta as their own son. Bhagta is now married to Kartari who is an ill-tempered and crooked woman. Bhagta has two sons Kala and Maghi.

In the beginning of the novel, the government officials want Bishna and his brother Bhagta to leave the possession of their house because a road is to be built exactly at the same place where their house is located. Bishna is not ready to leave his house. He even refuses to take a plot at another place as a compensation for his house. When police come to take the possession of their house they lock the doors from inside and police have to struggle in order to arrest them. After having the possession of the

---

30 Mandi means a market place. In Punjab, where the dominant profession is agriculture, mandi particularly denotes the market where the crops are sold along with other commodities.
house, Bishna and Bhagta are set free on bail. That evening, a minister comes in their area for a public-meeting and to resolve the problems of people. Bishna goes to meet the minister in the meeting. The presence of Gokal Chand, Shiv Ram and Thamman Mal, the immoral and greedy persons of mandi, on the stage with the minister irritates Bishna. He raises the question of his house so strongly in the public-meeting that the minister gets disturbed.

Kartari quarrels with her husband Bhagta and thinks Bishna and Daya kaur responsible for her husband’s arrest and insult. Daya Kaur and Bishna are full of love for Kala and Maghi but Kartari does not allow her sons to go to their house. However, Kala and Maghi often stealthily slip to meet Daya kaur and Bishna who would play with them and give eatables.

Budha has been helping Bishna’s family in their profession of carpentry for fifteen years. He regards Bishna as his elder brother. Daya Kaur and Bishna also treat him as their own family member. Bishna, though unwillingly, decides to part with Bhaga and asks Budha to help him (Bhagta) in his work. Budha reluctantly agrees to what Bishna asks him to do. Bishna and Daya Kaur start living in a hata which is adjoining to the old haveli of Bishna’s father. Bishna gives the haveli to Bhagta and his family. Long time back, seth Toti Mal had given the hata to Bishna’s father so that it could be maintained properly. Initially, Bishna’s father was not interested in taking care of the hata but after Toti’s numerous pleadings, he somehow agreed to it. Hetiya is Bishna’s friend who lives alone in his kothri on the outskirts of Mandi. He is poor but honest. Bishna occasionally goes to meet him and they spend a merry time by poking light-hearted jokes at one another.

Thola makes a false statement against Bishna in the court due to which both Bishna and Bhagta are imprisoned for three months. Before going to jail, Bishna asks

---

31 Hata is an open space enclosed by a small boundary wall. In most of the villages of Punjab, hata is used to keep the tools of agriculture or to keep the animals especially bovines.
Buta, who is a Muslim and in the village, known by the name of Parja-Mandlia, to stay at his home and Budha to take care of Daya Kaur. Daya Kaur develops a very affectionate relationship with the children of Buta. Kartari again abuses Bishna and Daya Kaur in front of the neighbours. Thola hypocritically comes to sympathise with Daya Kaur but she abuses and attacks him. Daya Kaur starts getting hysterical convulsions in the form of a khed. Her health deteriorates because of these fits. She makes a symbolic image of Thola in her house in the form of a scarecrow. She projects her anger on this image and curses Thola. Meanwhile, the economic condition of Kartari’s house worsened because Bhagta is in the jail. Daya Kaur helps Kartari and sends a sack full of grains to her house for children.

Bishna returns home after three months. He remains stable and in high spirit during and after the imprisonment. On the other hand, Bhagta feels sad and dejected. He is depressed to such an extent that he looses strength to do any work. Kartari’s vicious behaviour makes his condition more miserable. Bishna goes to his house to encourage him but after listening Kartari’s sarcastic remarks he finds it difficult to stand there and returns home. He somehow controls his anger. He asks Budha to boost up the morale of Bhagta so that he can restart his work. With the initiative of Budha, Bhagta resumes his work.

One day Toti comes to claim his hata. Bishna straightforwardly refuses to vacate the hata and asks Toti to get out of hata immediately. Daya Kaur joins Bishna and they warn him not to make such a demand again. Toti files a case against Bishna for the illegal possession of the hata. Bishna picks up a quarrel with the clerk in the court because he addresses Bishna as “karigara” and his opponent Toti Mal as “seth ji”. The court gives its decision in favour of Toti. After few days, Toti, along with two policemen, comes to take the possession of the hata. Bishna is not at home. Daya Kaur

---

32 In the first half of the twentieth century, a number of committees and forums were formed to improve the general condition of poor peasants and other workers and one such public platform that emerged in 1928 was Punjab Riyasti Praja Mandal. “The main objectives of this Praja Mandal were the protection of the rights and liberties of the common people, the setting up of representative institutions in the states and the amelioration of the condition of the peasants” (“The Sikh Encyclopedia” 2).
resists bravely and in rage gets a convulsion. When Daya Kaur becomes unconscious, policemen throw their luggage out in the street. They pick up the manji, on which Daya Kaur lays unconscious, and put it in the middle of the street. They lock up the house and return. Just after ten feet distance, they see Bishna coming in. In their presence, Bishna picks up a hammer and breaks the lock with one stroke. He sarcastically invites them to come inside and have something to eat. Observing Bishna’s furious mood, Toti, along with two policemen, flies from the site.

Bishna is imprisoned for another two months because of the illegal possession of the hata. Daya Kaur’s health deteriorates with the passage of time. She starts getting hysterical convulsions more often. By that time, Bhagta’s work has flourished in the area. His financial condition improves considerably. He has also developed friendly relations with Thola, Gokal Chand and other money lenders of the Mandi. One day Toti comes to meet Bhagta and suggests him that he should claim the compensation for his lost house because he has fifty percent share in that house. He even offers his help in arranging a plot of 20 marlas as a compensation from the government officials. Then he makes another offer:

After taking a deep sigh, Toti started off in somewhat self assured manner, "Karigara, you too had a fifty percent share in the house from where you were thrown out. If you agree, we could arrange for some compensation or get you a piece of land in the new basti in lieu of that. As far as the question of being just and fair is concerned, well…’

Lifting his gaze, he peered straight into Bhagta’s eyes, speaking with more self assurance than ever before, ‘You’re wise yourself. In such practical matters, there are no legal glitches. Out of the allotted land, you write off a portion of the land, equivalent to our compound [hata], in our name. In lieu of that, we’ll write off the compound [hata] where your brother lives in your name. As it is, your brother doesn’t have any legal heirs. He may be around for another four years or a little more than that. Ultimately, everyone has to leave… It’s quite a prime property, right next to your house, and in the middle of the Mandi. That’s how one acquires a property, if one’s lucky … Your children will bless you. Now, you decide.’ (160)

Bhagta gets puzzled by this proposal of Toti. When he shares this matter with his wife Kartari, she encourages him to act according to the advice of Toti and Bhagta
agrees without much difficulty. Toti’s plan is executed within few days. Budha goes to see Bishna in the jail and tells him the whole matter. Bishna gets annoyed with this act of Bhagta. He decides that he will not stay in that hata anymore. When he returns home from the jail, he asks Daya Kaur to immediately leave the hata. Daya Kaur, as if already prepared, leaves the hata along with him. They walk towards an unknown place.

After ten years, Bishna and Daya Kaur are shown living in their ancestral village. Over the years, Daya Kaur has become weak, blind and ailing. Bishna does small works of carpentry to make his living. Rama Akali becomes his friend who passes his free time by sitting at Bishna’s work-place and having a little gossip with him. Though Bishna has grown old yet his attitude towards life is the same. One day Surjan, who is known in the village by the name Surjan Richh, comes to get the leveller of his plough fixed. He does not show any respect to Bishna and starts talking illogically. When it becomes difficult for Bishna to tolerate him anymore, he picks up his log of wood and throws it out into the street. He warns Surjan that he should not even cross his door next time.

In the village, Santu and his family take care of Bishna and Daya kaur. Santu regards Bishna as his father. Santu’s wife and his daughters also respect Bishna and Daya Kaur and help them in cooking and other house-chores. Bishna narrates stories to Santu’s son and plays with him. Though Bishna does not want to bother them in any matter but it is difficult for him to bluntly refuse their favours done with so much affection and dedication.

After some time, Daya Kaur’s condition becomes critical. Budha and Bhagta come to see her. She asks Bagta that she wants to meet Kala and Maghi, at least once before her death. Bhagta promises her that some day he would come to see her with his entire family. But the very next night, Daya Kaur passes by. Bishna, according to his natural attitude, remains stable and performs all the rituals normally. After every ritual is over, Bhagta, along with relatives and the wise men of the village, requests Bishna to go along with him at his house in Mandi. After a long discussion, Bishna reluctantly agrees.
Bishna feels suffocated at Bhagta’s house in Mandi. He asks Bagta to make a small kothri for him in his other house. He starts living alone in that kothri. Kala comes to give him food there every morning and evening. One day Bishna goes to meet his old friend Hetiya and there he comes to know that he has died few days back. He passes by his old lost house and notice that the road has not been yet built at that place. One rainy day, Maghi comes to his kothri and they both drink liquor. When drunk, Maghi fails to control himself and tells the truth to Bishna that his father is a bad person and his mother thinks it a burden to cook for him (Bishna). Bishna gets extremely disturbed. Next day, Kala comes to give him food. As soon as he returns, Bishna picks up the rotis and throws them away in anger.

After a few days, Maghi again comes to kothri at night. He is drunk. He abuses his father and his friend Thola. He says, “Tay…ya! …. These people … my father … Thola … the bania … I wish I could devour all of them!” (237). He cuts his hand with his teeth so hard that his skin tears off. After that he goes unconscious. Bishna feels as if somebody was following Maghi. When Bishna chases the shadow in the dark, it leads to Bhagta’s house. When Bishna sees through a hole in the door, he notices that Thola is sitting with Bhagta. Bishna returns to his kothri, picks up an axe and with these words -“Dare you drink the blood of my grandson!” (239) – runs to attack Thola. On the corner, he looses his balance, falls flat on his face and dies. After a year of Bishna’s death, Maghi, the rebel, runs away from his house.

Even after three years of Bishna’s death, Bhagta feels exasperated if anyone mentions his (Bishna’s) or Maghi’s name. “And all he says before lapsing into a deathly silence is, “Why take their names? They have vanished, as if they had never been at all” (242).

Since its publication, The Survivors has been catching the attention of various critics, academics, students of literature and general readers for numerous reasons. It has been interpreted, evaluated, appreciated and awarded, from time to time, for its different aspects like diction, realistic description of contemporary society, cultural values, creative imagination and so on. But the point towards which the centripetal
force lays—and which is indisputably acknowledged by all—is its distinctive characterization. It is basically a character based novel which is quite different from his earlier novel *The Last Flicker (Marhi Da Deeva)*—an event based novel. The underlying motif, which remained consistent and dominant in almost all these interpretations, is the characterization of Bishna and Daya Kaur. Prof. Sant Singh Sekhon once said about the characters of *The Survivors*:

…these characters shall live in the collective memory of our people…with the same intensity and fervour with which Hamlet still lives on or Don Quixote has managed to live in the popular imagination of the West.

There are several characters in the novel but the characters who primarily dominate the novel are Bishna, his wife Daya Kaur and his nephew Maghi. The author also presents another class of characters who are the representatives of the dominant social and economic order. These are Toti, Thamman, Gokal and Thola. Bishna’s brother Bhagta, his (Bhagta’s) wife Kartari and their son Kala are shown as if transforming from one social position to other. They not only abandon Bishna after criticizing him severely for his intrepidity and stubbornness but eagerly join Bishna’s adversaries who are from the group of dominant social order. Despite having joined the dominant social order, their condition does not get better or alter qualitatively because they are not welcomed in the new group, neither are they able to depart from their class consciousness which is always already there in the background of unceasing cognitive domains of these characters:

For several months, Bhagta couldn’t walk past the corner from where he and Kala had picked up Bishna, and carried him back to kothri. If Bhagta ever sat out on the road to work, he made sure he didn’t look that way. Once in a while, his eyes fell on the pits behind the house on the outskirts. They had the same sheen as Bishna’s pockmarked face….Bhagta would be struck by strange, nameless fears….Bhagta feels as if both of them [Bishna and Maghi] cling to him like ghosts. (241)
Bishna and Daya Kaur in the Context of Heroism of Punjab

Before analyzing the characters of Bishna and Daya Kaur in the context of heroism of Punjab, it is imperative to understand their problematical circumstances and their position in society from where they emerge and prove themselves as heroes, superior to their environment and fellow beings. These intricate circumstances and their position in society prepare a ground for their struggle with the establishment, and which in a way, turn out to be their battlefield. The loathsome social and political environment around Bishna and Daya Kaur is like a quagmire, however it fails to control and dominate them physically and ideologically as well. Bishna and Daya Kaur fight for maintaining the essential human dignity in the transforming economic values which has been symbolized by the place Mandi in the novel. They emerge as winners in every adverse situation. Therefore, let us first explore the circumstances and the background of these characters before moving towards their parallel position to the heroes of Punjab.

In this novel, Gurdial Singh paints the picture of both pre and post-independent Punjabi life and culture (particularly of the Malwa region) at a semi urban place that he calls Mandi. If we contemplate the biography of Gurdial Singh, we instantaneously come to know that Mandi alludes to his native place Jaito Mandi which nowadays is a small township in the district Faridkot of the Malwa region of Punjab. Though it has hardly changed over the time, it should not be confused with or imagined through its present status. Instead, it was, according to the time and space of the narration, very much like a village and, like many other villages of the country at that time, on its way to become a small town during the (so-called) pre-independence developing phase of India under princely states. The incident with which the novel begins and throws light on its characters is the direct outcome, or one may say, is one of the consequences of that developing phase.

In the beginning of the novel, Bishna has been shown struggling against the police in order to retain the possession of his house and the police, on the other hand, are shown throwing him out of it because his house was located at the same place
where a road was to be built to Mandi. In this struggle he is accompanied by his courageous wife Daya Kaur and meek brother Bhagta. This struggle has been overtly depicted by the author through a direct confrontation between the characters of the novel and the state. Bishna and Daya Kaur are resounding the battle cries (Bole-sonihāl, Sat-shri-akāl) from inside the house and the police are ready to jump over the walls at any time to arrest them. The people who are watching the scene are struck by an incomprehensible fear. At last the police manage to arrest Bishna and Bhagta and bring them out in handcuffs. Bishna, here, fearlessly makes a sarcastic comment on the people standing nearby for their passive behaviour at that time. Bishna and Daya Kaur, from this very first incident, are introduced to the readers as courageous, stoic, stubborn and intrepid characters.

Gurdial Singh, in his out-of-the-ordinary and subtle way, spontaneously inflicts his readers to enter multi-dimensional divergent thinking by putting many complex existential riddles before them through the creation of some striking scenes (like the beginning of The Survivors) in his novels. Like John Donne’s poems, the opening of The Survivors too jolts the consciousness of its readers and, for a moment, it becomes difficult to understand and believe whether Bishna and Daya Kaur really belong to this world (which apparently is dominated and created by the people like Totti, Thola Mal, Gokal Chand and Thamman) or have descended from some other place.

The derivation that emerges from this incident is the role of the society which, at first sight, gives the impression of being passive and hypocritical. Though Bishna is politically naïve, he has a vague idea of and a little awareness about what is wrong and what is judicious. When Bishna, his wife Daya Kaur and his brother Bhagta are arrested and taken out of their own house like dacoits, he sarcastically comments on the passivity of the people standing around as:

‘Look! O you people of the town! The government has arrested the dacoits and is now dragging the damned criminals away!’ But even as he spoke, a slow, determined smile lit up his face. His beady eyes started to smoulder, and his pockmarked face and broad forehead burned red. (18)
In his words and body language, there is an ironical complaint to the people standing around him against the functioning of the repressive structures. He is aware of the limitations of the people and seems to be mocking at their helplessness. His expression is certainly complex and beyond the understanding of the common populace who think him to be a stubborn, unreasonable and crabby man. But in his voice, the age-long dissent, which is always in conflict with the authorities, is veiled. He stands head above his fellow beings for the reason that his words reflect the roughness of the soil he is a product of and troublesome background of heroism he is part of. With the above comment of Bishna, the writer poses a complex relationship of power conflict which, generally, and in this case particularly, favours the State and whoever crosses the boundary drawn by the law and state is considered an intruder or a dacoit. Bishna is, no doubt, unable to understand the complex structure of the state and the relation between its various bodies. But for him, individual freedom is like a master key with which every social and existential problem can be solved. He is angry with the people who do not exercise their individual rights of freedom. Instead, they act as they are expected to act by the prevalent social order or establishment.

The narrator, with incredible adeptness, has depicted the weakening human relationships in the metamorphosing economic milieu symbolized by the place Mandi. Mandi, in Punjabi language, means a market or the place where crops are sold according to the set rules fixed by the government. Everything around and inside Mandi possesses some commercial value. During the later part of the nineteenth century, British Government started a campaign in India (especially in the North) generally known as agricultural transformation. “The closing decades of nineteenth century saw…the transformation arising from the commercialization of the region’s [Punjab’s] agriculture” (Ian Talbot 3). This agricultural transformation also brought along with it the reorganization of Mandis for the purpose that the peasants could bring their crops at one specified place. It was for the convenience of the officials of the revenue department of British India because, earlier, it was difficult for them to regulate uniform rates and collect grain from different places. Side by side a new class was emerging interrelated with these Mandis and it was the class of commission agents or the money lenders who served as middle persons between the officers of the
Revenue Department and the local peasants. Initially, this class was encouraged by British Government in order to maintain a control and connection with the basic level i.e. with the local peasants and working classes. But after some time, these commission agents or the moneylenders started replacing the landlords by grabbing the land of the poor peasants when they failed to return the loan due to them. After it acquired dangerous dimensions, the Government started worrying about the matter and a note was published by the Revenue Department in October 1895 as:

It is essential on the one hand that the management of the villages should be in the hand of men who possess the confidence of the villagers, and it is equally essential on the other that if the executive to be obeyed and its objectives rightly understood, there should be a class of men intermediate between the Government and the mass of the people who, while trusted by the Government, should have influence on their neighbours. In this respect the moneylender can never take the place of large ancestral landlord or the substantial yeoman whom he dispossesses (Barrier 37).

As long as the concern of the moneylenders remained limited to agriculture only, they played very crucial and significant role in the sense that they facilitated the selling of crops easily and their munims helped the uneducated farmers with complex calculations which, for them (the farmers), were difficult to do. But the real purpose and position of these moneylenders were revealed when they started dominating the personal and domestic lives of the peasants. The camouflage was removed and the role of moneylenders was upturned from supporter to exploiter. They opened their own shops and made full use of the semesterly income of farmers by giving them the goods of daily use and imposing heavy taxes on them. With the passage of time, not only the peasants, but many other people from different professions like carpenters, tanners, ironsmiths, potters, weavers etc. started taking financial aid from these moneylenders, for which, they had to pay heavy interest in return.

In *The Survivors*, it has been beautifully depicted how the environment of Mandi affects and alters human relations, personal lives and familial values. This becomes fairly evident from what happens in the lives of Bhagta and Bishna. Due to their huge age-gap, Bishna and his wife Daya Kaur bring up Bhagta like their own

---

33 Accountants
child. Daya Kaur does all which can possibly be done by a mother for her son. After Bhagta gets married, his wife Kartari makes him aware of the system of Mandi: how to ensure one’s existence by making bond with the establishment (Thola Mal and Toti), to which Bishna is utterly in opposition. Bhagta, fascinated by and attached with financial values, forgets human values and concerns and is ready to make bonds with the moneylenders at any cost. Mandi proves to be a place where not only crops are sold but relationships are also regarded as commodity: a thing that can be seen in respect of profit and loss only. Mandi, in a way, contains dual connotation: on the one hand it provides space to those whose personal and social lives are dominated and influenced by the concepts of profit and loss (in whatever shape it may be), and on the other hand it is like a dreadful giant to those who consider human dignity and concern the pivotal point of existence. Mandi is a suitable place for Totti, Gokal, Thola, Thamman and Bhagta because they are in tune with its environment. But for Bishna, Daya Kaur and Maghi, Mandi is a repulsive, dry and hollow space and its environment is predominantly suffocating.

The discussion of the concept of Mandi is significant because it throws light on the circumstances of Bishna in which he finds himself completely misfit. The reasons for his incompatibility with these circumstances are numerous but the basic one is that in his evaluation, life is more meaningful than the economic values while his antagonists think exactly the opposite. For him, life is not enclosed by and depends on the laws of profit and loss, instead, it is surrounded by the humanistic concern for each other where everyone respects the freedom of the other and his right to live with self-esteem. Unfortunately, he fails to get that respect for his free mindedness from the society he is living in. Instead of accepting his humiliation submissively, he takes up the mode of confrontation which, though unknowingly, steers him towards the route followed by almost all the legendary and patriotic heroes of Punjab.

His confrontation contains a dual characteristic i.e. physical as well as ideological. Physically, he struggles against the police, the vazir³⁴, the administrator in the court and Surjan. Ideologically, he opposes every notion that advocates passive

³⁴ The minister
acceptance of any kind of subjugation – whether it is economic, political or social. His thoughtful discussions with Buta and Rama Akāli corroborate his philosophy of life which, if anatomized intensely, matches with those of the legendary heroes of Punjab. His way of carrying himself in extreme arduous situations, his minute and blatant comments on the biased judicial system, his repugnance of a particular class (which gives priority to economic values more than anything else), his clash with the authorities in the background of his social status – all these characteristics insinuate an image and this image is indubitably that of a Punjabi hero.

The adjective “Punjabi” in the phrase “Punjabi hero” connotes all those traits which are particular to the heroes who belong to the geographical area called Punjab. Before the partition of India and Pakistan, Punjab had a large area under its premises (loosely the area between the rivers the Indus and the Ganges) including Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab (India) and the Punjab which is now in Pakistan. This area contains one of the most fertile lands of the world and due to this factor, the major occupation of the inhabitants of this area remained agriculture throughout the ages. It has a glorious past in the sense that it has been a favourite place for the philosophers, saints and rulers from the ancient times. Throughout the ages, it has got its own particular ideas about the truth, morality, ethics, heroism, swarg-narak and even of leading one’s life itself. Heroism, as a conception and a phenomenon, is not a separate category rather a higher way of carrying oneself while maintaining the basic codes of truth, morality, justice, self-pride and Karama-dharma. There are no fixed criteria or fields reserved for heroes to work upon yet whatever they do or achieve in their lives frequently set examples for others to follow. This idiosyncratic behaviour of the inhabitants of Punjab, which can also be called Punjabiat with all its traits and modes together, has given rise to a number of heroes: legendary heroes like Dulla Bhatti, Jeona Maur, Jagga Daku, Sucha Surma and Mirza; patriotic heroes like Kartar Singh Srbha, Bhagat Singh, Shaheed Udham Singh; and historical Figures like Porus, Maharaja Ranjit Singh and so on.

35 The one who has any connection with Shiromani Akāli Dal (the political party) which was established on 14 December 1920 as a task force of Shromani Gurudvārā Parbandhak Committee. The members of this party consider themselves as the representatives of Sikh religion.
In the context of the present novel, the image that is most closely associated with or echoes in its protagonist (Bishna) is that of Dulla Bhatti. The real name of Dulla Bhatti was Abdulla Bhatti and he was born in the area of Sandal Bar near Lahore (now in Pakistan) to mother Ladhi and father Farid Khan. His father belonged to a warrior clan of Bhattis who always remained in clash with the Mughal rulers. They refused to pay taxes imposed on them by Akbar and declared themselves free by rejecting him as their ruler. Fighting for their rights of freedom, they got support from the common and poor peasants. For his rebellious activities, Dulla’s father was captured and killed ruthlessly by Akbar. Dulla, since his childhood, was very brave and grew up as an adept fighter. It is generally believed that Dulla took birth at the same time when Akbar’s son Salim (who latter was throned as Jahangir) was born. Salim was very weak and the *hakims* (doctors) advised Akbar that Salim should be given breast feed by a strong and healthy woman. Akbar, who was at that time in Lahore, brought Ladhi (Dulla’s mother) to Delhi and made her to breast feed Salim. Dulla, along with her mother, spent some years in Delhi and then came back to Lahore. He came to know about the murder of his father by Akbar in his adolescence. He then pledged to take revenge on Akbar and started making his own gang of dacoits. Not only his father, but his grandfather was also said to be killed by the *Mughal* army. It has also been narrated in *Dulle Di Vaar* as:

"हे संतख हरन मातिर, ।

हिंचा खेते हिंचा था। ।

तबलां जीर्नां धरां सत्ता वे, ।

जीर्नां सत्ता उठा। (सिन्ध, जुराशभ 72)"

*(Your grandfather was murdered,*

*In the sack he was dumped.*

*Mughals* turned the skin into effigy,

*With air it was pumped)*
Dulla, who was a born rebel, could not tolerate this disgrace. He did not ever bow to the authorities and always created a trouble for the Mughal army. In the meantime, Akbar had a problem with his son Salim on the matter of his love-affair with Anārkali. Salim rebelled against his father and came towards North-West where he met Dulla. Initially he encouraged Dulla to continue making trouble for his father. He even helped Dulla to make a small army of dacoits. Dulla was the leader of that army of dacoits and they used to loot from the imperial treasure and the merchants of that area. The famous loot among those loots was the stealing of horses from a merchant of the middle-east who was going to gift them to Akbar. Although Dulla used to loot yet one thing that remained appreciable throughout his career was that he never looted or even troubled any deprived or poor person. Moreover, he regularly used to distribute his loots among the poor. His compassion for the poor made him very popular in the area where he also confronted Mughal armies through guerrilla warfare. Consequently, Mughal army had to face exasperating impenetrability in locating him in that area.

When we critically speculate on Dulla’s life-history, some heroic attributes spontaneously come into prominence: his brave and wild nature, his never-to-submit attitude and his compassion for the poor or any underprivileged being. All these attributes echoes, though sometimes subtly, in the character of the protagonist of The Survivor when we move through the novel. He epitomizes the concept of heroism through his actions and his philosophical debates with the various characters of the novel like Buta, Hetiya, Rama AKâli and his nephew, Maghi. One thing that deserves attention about Bishna in particular and the concept of Punjabi hero in general, is that the Punjabi hero is a hero on individual level. He, for most of the time, belongs to the common populace as for as his origin or background is concerned. He emerges as a hero from the basic ground level generally without the help of any deux ex machina i.e. supernatural machinery. The only resource or favour with which he emerges as a hero is his own will power and inner determination towards a cause – the reason might be personal or social, depending on the situation. Stirred by his inner strength, he achieves
heroism on individual level i.e. he is not normally followed or accompanied by a large number of supporters, though he manages to get applause from them.

In the novel, Bishna appears to be tracing the steps followed by the heroes of Punjab by moving with courage, stoicism and single-mindedness. His courageous and bold nature is explored when he confronts the police along with his wife and his brother. The glow on his face, at the time of being taken away in handcuffs by the police, corroborates his unconquered and valiant nature. He is not ready to bow in front of the establishment because his will power and never-to-submit attitude do not allow him to do so. Saussure, the Swiss linguist, advocates a very evocative theory when he says that language is relative which means a word cannot be understood in isolation and it needs its relative words with slightly different significations in the syntagmatic chain. Derrida, the distinguished post-structuralist, develops this concept further with his concept of binary oppositions and argues that one thing needs its opposite to get understood in its position in the hierarchy. For example “white” would be a mandatory part of that hypothesis in which the meaning of “black” is sought. In the same way, we can conclude what is at the centre only when we would have the knowledge of what is on the margin.

By bringing this concept close to Bishna-Bhagta relationship, it becomes apparently evident that they are standing on two opposite poles, at the two end-points of pendulum, representing two entirely different philosophies of leading their lives like binary oppositions. Bishna is confident, determined and stoic. Bhagta, on the other hand, is weak, greedy, passive and has no fixed standards for his way of living. The phenomenal contradiction with the authorities over which Bishna feels pride, Bhagta feels ashamed of and guilty. While Bishna and Daya Kaur are raising battle cries as “Bole so Nih…al…Sat Shri Ak…al,” Bhagta is walking with downcast eyes. “Despite the winter, his body was drenched in sweat” (18). He lacks the courage and determination to oppose the oppression which makes the very base of Bishna’s being. The tendency to oppose the authorities remained a particular and overriding motif of Punjabi heroes. For instance, Dulla, along with his father and grandfather, never accepted the terms and conditions imposed by Akbar, the great Mughal Emperor. They
preferred death rather than to efface their inner selves which were full of freedom and self-respect.

This propensity of opposing the authorities or establishment is evident in the character of Bishna and continues to become acute as we move through the narrative from the beginning to the end. The perceptible point here is that this propensity has not been derived from any outside source or unpleasant incident, it is very much there and an indispensable part of Bishna’s being. He is already having an image of a *Ranghad* among the people of his society. This image has been inscribed on the minds and memories of the people through his consistently obstinate behaviour. When he goes to meet the *vazir* in the *Pandal*, one of them remarks, “Oye Ranghra! Join your hands in obeisance, for once” (25). For the people, who are sitting there, joining of hands is an obligatory action when one goes as a petitioner in front of the *vazir*. But Bishna deliberately uses this tool, which people thinks obligatory, just to annoy and infuriate the *vazir*. He joins his hands “so awkwardly that it brought a strange, sarcastic smile to his lips. And then he looked straight into the *vazir’s* eyes with eagle eyes” (25). It makes the *vazir* restless. This rebellious attitude that Pash engraves as “to defer the rulers with relentless derision” (Gill 91) instinctively emanates from within Bishna and consequently makes him stand parallel to the heroes of Punjab.

Pash, the distinguished revolutionary Punjabi poet, has retained the spirit of freedom and revolution of Punjabi heroes through his exceedingly thought provoking and subversive poetry. Most of his poems comprise the essence of living with pride, self – respect and fortitude. In his voice, one can feel the echo of an incomparable resistance against the authorities which is the chief feature and part of philosophy of living of Bishna too. Being a carpenter by profession, he belongs to working strata which is generally regarded as inferior to the other privileged castes as Jats, Brahmins etc. The people can only envisage him in his traditionally predetermined image: working passively and submissively without raising objections to the ruling policies of the establishment. But Bishna, analogous to an ideal image of a free human being created by Pash in his poetry, is determined to break all the barriers of tradition,

---

36 A community of Rajputs who are generally known as proud and haughty
religion, power and ideology that obstruct a man to live with freedom and pride. He possesses all the qualities which Pash dreams in his poem “Hath” (The Hands):

Hands are not there for menial work only
They can also be there for exploiters to smash.
Those who violate the religion of hands
Those who insult their aesthetics
They are with paralysis stricken,
For hands are meant to provide support
They are meant assent to report. (Gill 43)

Bishna thus proves to be that ideal person whose image Pash creates through his rebellious poetry. He is against any kind of passive acceptance of oppression whether it exists on physical, ideological or political level. At the same time, he possesses a soft corner for the deprived like Hetiya and Kaniya. Anywhere in the novel, he does not lose his concern for what is happening around him and also with himself. His voice is not only difficult but impossible for the authorities to subdue. Even Pash seems to corroborate this attitude of Bishna in his very famous and significant poem “Ominous” as:

“Ominous is not loot of labour.
Or torture by the police,
Even greed that betrays is not most ominous at all.

....
Ominous is infact
To be filled with dead silence,
Lose concern and bear all things unconcerned,
To become slave of routine,
Ominous is in fact
The death of our dreams. (Gill 103)
The most dreadful and sinful thing in one’s life is, according to Bishna, to be carried away by the sway of time according to the prevailing ideology. His ideological conflict with the establishment and conceptual difference from his brother has the same ideological basis. His brother is almost immediately carried away by the economic values instigated in him by his wife Kartari and the moneylender Gokal. Bhagta’s economic dependence on Gokal, during his imprisonment and after, actually cripples him ideologically as well as conceptually. Consequently, he does not, in fact can not, have any particular concept for living his life, and is treated as sub-standard human by almost everybody in the novel. In the beginning of the novel, he is shown inferior to his brother Bishna, and then he is dominated by his wife Kartari, Gokal and Toti and, in the later part of the novel, by his own sons Kala and Maghi. Quite apposite to it, Bishna’s conscious dominates the novel form the beginning to the end and no other character, except his own wife Daya Kaur and his nephew Maghi, has the ability and courage to stand equivalent to him.

Daya Kaur, like her husband Bishna, has been shown as a strong and determined woman in the novel. She surpasses the conventional image of an ideal Indian housewife by standing parallel to her husband in his struggle against the establishment. She seems to be breaking all those presuppositions according to which women are considered fragile, feeble, delicate and submissive as compared to their male counterparts. Daya Kaur, on the other hand, is a brave, stoic and fearless woman who knows how to maintain her self-respect and dignity in the metamorphosing economic and social arrangements. Fighting for her rights, she reflects the images of those brave Indian heroines who stood against various types of transgressions from time to time instead of submissively accepting them. Like Jhansi Di Rani or Mai Bhago, she herself comes at the forefront to fight heroically against the wrongdoings of the authorities. Her hatred towards the oppressors often bursts in the form of a hysterical fit or sometimes in a real physical action (when she really swirls a pestle towards Thola when he hypocritically comes to sympathize with her).

The narrator has used a very subtle yet convincing instrument to depict the inner violence and resentment of Daya Kaur through her fits of hysteria which, in
Punjabi language, is equivalent to *khedana*. According to the Punjabi culture, it is commonly believed that the soul of a dead person, who is often a close relative or ancestor, enters the body of the one over whom the *khed* comes in the form of a *mātā* or *bābā*. This soul is believed to know everything about the past, present and future. The popular or widely practiced method to call upon the soul of *bābā* or *mātā* is to rotate one’s head in a regular circular motion with wildly open hair— as Daya Kaur does in the novel.

Daya Kaur invites *bābā*— like Harothgar (the king of Danes) invites Beowulf (the great Greek Hero) to kill Grendel (the man-eater monster) — who will end the injustice or oppression by punishing the real culprits like Thola and Toti. After probing the image of *bābā*, we would easily be convinced that this is a mental image of an ideal hero who, with his warfare qualities, is expected to destroy the external dominant world (the establishment). In the case of Daya Kaur, this mental image of an ideal hero symbolizes her own husband (Bishna). When she says that it is the order of *bābā* that the hair of Thola’s beard should tear away, she, in a way, is reflecting the hatred of Bishna through the image of *bābā*. According to Freud, when one person or event is represented by another which is in some way linked or associated with it, perhaps because of a similar sounding word, or by some form of symbolic substitution, is called *displacement* (Barry 98). Therefore, through the image of *baba* an ideal hero appears who is none other than Bishna himself.

During his practice of dream analysis, Freud strongly believed that things do not happen or occur in an exact and diametrical manner. However, they often occur symbolically. The inner fears, suppressed wishes, carnal desires and aspirations find their way through dreams which are directly linked with the environment one lives in. In almost similar manner, Daya Kaur’s sub-conscious and unconscious material, which she has obtained through strolling about the suffocating economic and political environment of the *Mandi*, become apparent when she passes through *khed*. There is an insurgency, uprising and revolt in her shrieks against a particular class (whose basis of existence is economic and not the human dignity) which is dominating and monolithic too. However her aggression does not only get manifested through
unconscious subtle ways but the intensity of resentment is so acute that she cannot resist herself from expressing it consciously, in the form of *khed*. Instead of outpouring her exasperation subtly or symbolically, she impolitely curses whom she thinks responsible for her oppression. She is not suppressed physically (neither she could be) but ideologically when she has been thrown out from her own house. The idea of living with pride, dignity and contentment is suppressed by the materialistic class and Daya Kaur, like her husband, cannot passively tolerate it.

The perceptible thing is that she is often dragged in this mental state at some particular stage in the course of the narration: when Toti comes to claim his *hata* and when Bishna is sent to jail for the second time. All these incidents, at least on conceptual level, indicate that at the time Daya Kaur resorts to these hysterical acts, she is passing through a particular state of mind which is full of aggression, anger and violence. Moreover it also implies that there is a deep but antagonistic connection between the world outside (society) and the inner world of Daya Kaur. Whenever a person tries to intrude into the personal world of Daya Kaur or tries to violate her essential human dignity, she undertakes this method to exhibit her ferocity and vehemence.

The deep and meticulous inspection of the root-cause of this type of hysterical behaviour would lead one to the social and personal repression of an individual by the incontrovertible economic, political and judicial institutions. When an individual, walking through one’s domestic and social responsibilities, finds oneself unable to react overtly, he/she starts expressing one’s inner violence through these hysterical practices. There arises a powerful disagreement between the inner world of an individual and his physical environment (the world outside i.e. society). He/she takes the help of verbal violence and instead of being in action consciously, starts resisting unconsciously. In some cases, the anger is projected to some symbolic image just like Daya Kaur makes a scarecrow (an image of Thola) over which she can project her anger. In some other cases, one’s own body is taken as a symbol of a tormenter and is brutally beaten or punished unconsciously.
The particular thing about this hysterical practice which also stimulates analytical thinking is the absence of a particular section – economically well-established and socially dominant class. Consequently, it has become a specific and dominant mode of expressing resentment for those who are subsidiary. It is not a conscious expression but a sub-conscious revolution on individual level. This practice is adopted only when there is no scope or space for direct confrontation with the establishment or authorities. Then, through this pursuit, an ideal hero in the form of mātā or bābā – a supernatural persona or even god himself – is called upon to terminate the oppression the individual is suffering from.

On empirical grounds, it has been typically noticed that only a particular section of society that is marginal practices khedna (the hysterical behaviour). And even among that section which is further marginalized or twice removed from the centre is more likely to be exposed to this practice. This doubly removed section (like the black women argue in feminism about their identity which they think has been twice removed from the centre: that is, firstly, being “women” as compared to “men,” and secondly, being “black” as compared to “white” women) includes, for the most part, rural women who belong to the economically backward strata.

Along with economical reasons, another factor that plays a substantial role in instigating women to fall prey to hysteria is the encumbrance of traditional and mythical image of women in Indian society. According to this image, women are reckoned as submissive, decent, biddable, acquiescent and duteous. Any step out of these particular categories puts a question mark on the existence of a woman as a normal human being and if she inadvertently does so, she is designated as an outcast, unfortunate, brazen, impudent, wicked and even having a loose character. The classic example of this image of woman has been depicted in Mulak Raj Anand’s famous novel Gauri. In this novel, especially in the first part of the novel, Gauri has been depicted as having cow-like qualities. She is shown as modest, humble and submissive house-wife whose chief concern is to do household chores, to serve her husband physically and emotionally, to accept and tolerate the beatings of her husband whenever he has a desire to do so. These cow-like qualities of Gauri formulate a
typical image of Indian women, full of politeness and decency. This typical image imposes some boundaries at domestic and social levels on women and consequently does not give them a space to respond or to express what they feel as human beings. There is no safety valve available to women through which they can blow their inner domestic, economic and social resentments. The non-availability of the space to express themselves, that has been caused by the hypocritical social and monolithic economic systems, leads them towards the uncontrolled unconscious expressions which are gathered together from the various impressions of their surroundings.

It has been observed repeatedly that the lives of those whom we usually designate as heroes remain full of actions, ups-and-downs. In other words, life does not offer them a smooth living the heroes themselves also do not aspire for that. The reason behind this is that the ways and menthols adopted by them to lead their lives do not match with the people living around them, or at larger scale, with society. This situation sometimes becomes so acute that they (the heroes) give the impression of being alienated form the rest of society or they appear to be in clash with almost everyone around them. Bishna and Daya Kaur are caught in the same situation. Though they possess compassionate hearts for the poor or deprived, yet most of the people who know them, consider them quarrelsome, belligerent and pugnacious. The lives of Bishna and his wife are not smooth as they have to go through a number of predicaments: all their children have died one after another in young ages, their means to earn their livelihood are very limited, they have been taken away from their legally constructed house, Bhagta (Bishna’s brother) leaves them after having given preference to economic values, Bishna has to go to the prison twice, they have to leave their hata (offered by Bhagta as a favour) in order to maintain their self-respect. Bishna’s hardships do not end here. His wife, Daya Kaur, falls sick and dies afterward, and at last he has to face Kartari’s cantankerous attitude when she says that she cannot make chapattis for a Shrik.

37 A relative (especially cousins or real brothers and their families). In Punjab, this term is used in negative sense when someone feels jealous of his relative’s success.
Going through all these hardships throughout the novel, Bishna and Daya Kaur never lose hearts at any point. They remain in immutable high spirits and know very well how to handle all their problems with stout hearts. They have the courage to look in the face of the problems in every situation without being disturbed a bit. When Sophocles’ Oedipus, blind and desperate, “realizes that the only bond linking him to the world is the cool hand of a girl, then a tremendous remark rings out: ‘Despite so many ordeals, my advanced age and the nobility of my soul make me conclude that all is well.’ Oedipus, like Dostoevsky’s Kirilov thus gives the recipe for the absurd victory. Ancient wisdom confirms modern heroism” (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 77).

The victories of these heroes, including Dulla and Bishna too, emanate from the conception of considering life as an organic whole, with its fermentations and intricacies together along with the exploration of human capacity to tackle them. They consider these predicaments and intricacies as a mandatory part of life itself. These problematic conditions of life, instead of offering despair, provide momentum to the lives of heroes to strive forward and “not to yield” (Tennyson 95). Speculating his life under the shadow of this philosophy, whenever Bishna faces a problem, he sings:

Keep your heart as strong as the mountains
Bhai, like the mountains…
And the gait and grace of lions…. (125)

Heroism consummately resonates when we see the problematic situations energizing Bishna and Daya Kaur’s conduct and concern with their lives and also make them able to say, in the words of Oedipus, “that all is well” (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 77).

**Bishna and Daya Kaur in Mythical Context**

Myths are normally considered as the storehouse of human dreams and aspirations, and they often keep on influencing, in one way or the other, the human
actions. The images formed and demonstrated by these myths – like phoenix resurrecting from its own ashes – become the source of life energy for the coming generations. This energy keeps the light burning in one’s heart and sometimes the human beings, inspired and fueled by this energy, do something amazing that, in normal conditions, is regarded impossible for them. The recurring images are known as archetypes. The reason behind this recurrence is that myths dominate our cognitive process (which Jung calls the collective unconscious), the sense of right and wrong, the difference between what is enormous and what is trivial. An individual perceives these images from various sources prevailing in his culture and evaluates his/her own actions in comparison to them. Whether mythic images or characters existed in reality or not is not a part of our study, but the impact that they have created on the lives and actions of the people cannot be denied.

Every community and culture has its own mythical background or in other words, they have their own stories and legends to justify their ways of living. For instance, Hindu community is dominated by the concept of karma-dharma because of a strong impact of the epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana. In Mahabharata, the conflict between good and evil, right and wrong, is depicted through the struggle of Pandavas against Kauravas to get the throne of Hastinapur which they thought legally belonged to them (Pandavas). However after analyzing the whole mythical context critically, one would come to know that the perception about “good” and “evil” or “right” and “wrong” does not exclusively divide them into two different spheres like two opposite prototypes. The boundaries between them are often blurred. For instance, the way Karna is killed by Arjuna (who has been considered the most powerful, wise, honest and morally good of Pandava brothers) puts a big question mark on him (Arjuna) being “good” and “right” as a true warrior and the hero of the epic. However Krishna, the mentor of Arjuna, bestows victory on him but, at the same time, crosses over the boundary of being a righteous warrior. Arjuna loses his glory and “goodness” as a warrior and Karna, though defeated, turns out to be the hero of the battle. On the other hand Duryodhana\(^{38}\), who generally symbolizes “evil,” appears to be judicious.

\(^{38}\) The name “Duryodhana” literally means a person who is difficult to fight with.
when he declares Karna the King of Anga because he was forbidden to show his skills in archery as a counterpart of Arjuna on the basis of being the son of a charioteer and thus a downcast.

Kripacharya, who was well versed in the rules of the single combat, came over as the referee. Before beginning the combat he addressed Karna, ‘Youth, what is your name and what is your lineage? We cannot go forward without knowing this information. Arjuna is a prince and cannot engage in single combats with unknown adventurers.’ At the mention of lineage, Karna bowed down his head, downcast, like a lotus in rain, for all his life he was thwarted in his attempts for being a charioteer's son. He braced himself for the insults to follow (“The Story of Karna: The Doomed Hero” 2).

It implies that it is only through right and judicious actions that one attains heroism and heroism does not necessarily lie in one’s victory or defeat. Arjuna, the conqueror of the battle, is defeated on moral and judicious grounds.

In Mahabharata, there are many characters who hypothesize the conceptualization of heroism in the light of one’s karma which, virtually and consequently, affects his dharma or vice-versa. However, the character who flawlessly follows the path of heroism in different situations is Karna. Despite being the son of the god, Surya and Kunti, Karna leads a low life because he was brought up by a charioteer, Adhiratha and his wife, Radha. During his lifetime, he was cursed and rejected by many high class persons in different situations. He fought against his misfortunes very bravely and was famous for keeping his words in any circumstances. He remained a loyal friend of Duryodhana, who was an ethically frail and crooked character, till his death. His heroism is concealed in his fidelity towards his friend Duryodhana, his sacrifice of the throne of Indraprastha and his weak background from where he emerges as a hero. Arjuna was assisted and supported by Deva (gods) while Duryodhana was helped by Danava (demons), and in this way, both possessed

---

39 Sun

40 Inderprastha was the name of the region that was under the possession of Pandavas. Krishna came to negotiate with Karna and after revealing his true identity (that he is the son of Surya and Kunti), asked him to join Padavas because being eldest brother of Pandavas he would be given the Kingship of Indraprastha.
strong favours. On the other hand, Karna was cursed by heavenly bodies (by Parshurama and Bhoomidevi) and selfishly used by Duryodhana but the way he managed to stand parallel to Arjuna and Duryodhana, makes him the real hero of the epic. Although he was defeated by Arjuna in the battle yet he surpasses in glory and heroism.

Another character who, despite his unnoticed background, substantially echoes in Mahabharata as a hero is Gatotkacha, the son of Bhima and Hadimbi. When Pandavas confronted two cannibal *rakshasas* (demons) Baka and Hadimba in the forest, Bhima killed both of them courageously. It was a great relief for the tribal people and also for the people living in the villages nearby. Drawn by the strength of Bhima, Hadimbi, the sister of the *rakshasa* Hadimba, married him and bore a son, Ghatotkacha. This name was attributed to him due to his physical structure that was like a “hairless pot.” He had a gigantic structure of his mother and immense strength of his father and that is why he was half *rakshasa* and half human. Bhima, because he had killed Baka and Hadimba, became very popular among the local tribes of the forest (presently Himachal). A number of references can be traced in Mahabharata where Bhima is shown as having a compassionate heart towards the poor. Despite having great physical strength, Bhima remained humble and noble towards the deprived.

Like his father, Ghatotkacha also remained a helping hand to the common populace. “In folk stories, Ghatotkacha is said to have helped abduct Balarama’s daughter, Vatsala, so that she could marry the man she loved – Arjuna’s son, Abhimanyu – instead of being forced into a loveless marriage with Duryodhan’s son, Lakshman” (Pattanaik). “While Ghatotkacha was a *rakshasa*, he was frequently described as being very humble and incredibly loyal – not the traits one would expect from of a bloodthirsty *rakshasa*” (Hatcher). Despite being a rakshasha, he never troubled the people of his area. Rakesh Menon writes:

Ghatotkacha was no ordinary child and at the end of the first month of his life, he was a full grown youth... Just as the growth of his body was prodigious, so was his

---

*Ghatam* in Sanskrit language means 'hairless' and *Utkach* means 'pot' (Hatcher).
mind’s…. What filled their hearts [Bheema and Hadimbi’s], more than Ghatotkacha’s phenomenal gifts, was his loving nature. (Menon 194)

He learned all the arts of the rakshasas from his mother and inherited an affectionate and chivalrous temperament from his father. He had also promised his father, Bhima, that he would appear in his services when needed. When he was summoned by his father in Kurukshetra war, he created such havoc among the Kauravas that Karna had to use his divine weapon to kill him. Though killed, his name is always reckoned among the great heroes of Mahabharata. He, like Karna, was not given any privilege; neither had he had any divine assistance on his part still he fought very determinedly, bravely and heroically.

The archetypes and images drawn from these myths subtly show a way to the general conduct and life-style of the inhabitants of the respective society. These myths, therefore, have played a significant role in establishing a conceptual link between the people and their heroes. Following the steps of Karna, though unconsciously, the legendary heroes of Punjab and, in the context of the novel, Bishna too appear to be on the same path. This path, without any doubt, does not lead them to the heights of victory but to the place where the most respectable and memorable heroes reside and to whom even the winners bow their heads.

The bond which binds all these heroes – Karna, Ghatotkacha, legendary heroes of Punjab (like Dulla, Jagga, Sucha and Jeona) and Bishna – together is their vehemence to stand against what is injudicious (though it depends on their individual perception) irrespective of their underprivileged backgrounds. The class, from which Bishna emerges as a strong opponent of the establishment, is of unhoye, which, in English means the class of non-existent. He is ideologically non-existent because he does not have any bond with the dominant ideology of the establishment, does not seek compensation for his lost house, and is not ready to live in the house offered by his brother as a favour. He is a fighter of rare quality who is not aware of any ideology but have a strong sense of living with pride. His profession, in the popular sense of the culture, does not allow him to retaliate but to behave as an indifferent and submissive being. He is a carpenter, an underprivileged caste according to the dominant cultural
tradition of Punjab, and, therefore should ideally be submissive but his courage is unusual to his rank. His work is generally considered as a service to society (in woodworks) through his skills. Standing on this frail background, he is in direct conflict with the “repressive structures” because his legally registered house has been snatched away from him against his will. At this point, his reaction is in no way abnormal or unique because any person would react in the same way in his existential situation when he is being made homeless by force. But the rare quality of Bishna’s character is revealed when one comes to know that he is not ready to take any compensation or the similar house in a better newly built colony for his lost house. His attachment to his house is not emotional but it is a matter of pride and dignity which has been drawn either consciously or unconsciously from his ancestors like Dulla, Jagga or Karna.

The perception of the concept and the difference between what is heroic and malice has been deeply engrossed in the unconscious of the culture of people of Punjab. This behaviour has been endowed with a particular attitude which, for the most part, is of resistance than of acceptance. Heroism, with various forms in different situations, has been observed emerging from this resistance. A typical kind of resistance can also be traced in the behaviour of Punjab’s various legendary heroes like Dulla Bhatti, Jeona Maur, Sucha Soorma and Jagga Daku\(^\text{42}\), which is against the controlling authorities in different social and individual situations. These heroes possessed a typical attitude of living their lives, free from any kinds of fears and control in different adverse situations of life – whether in personal or social domain. The fundamental base over which this resistance relies has been provided by personal dignity rather than economic values, moral and judicious preferences rather than opportunistic attitude and a control-free life rather than life restrained by any shallow social ethnicity. In the context of the present novel, the same kind of resistance can visibly be noticed in the personalities of Bishna, Daya Kaur and Maghi. Bishna resists conceptually as well as physically. His resistance reverberates the resistance of legendary heroes of Punjab because his way of standing against his enemies is violent.

\(^{42}\) Dacoit
Maghi, his nephew, later on follows the same path. Daya Kaur, on the other hand, expresses her resistance hysterically. However, her resistance is more acute and fierce than that of any other character of the novel.

Bishna is ferocious to everyone with the exception of his brother and his family. Like Karna to Duryodhana, he remains loyal to and benefactor of Bhagta even if he knows that he (Bhagta) is an opportunist. It has also been a typical trait of the heroes that they often generously ignore the shortcomings, even on rational grounds, of those with whom they are emotionally attached. Bishna is ready to fight with the whole world but for his brother he has only blessings. At many places in the novel, we may feel that Bishna is not happy with his brother because he has reconciled with the chaudharies whom Bishna hates the most. He is grief-stricken because of Bhagta’s compromising attitude but his repugnance for his brother is not of that kind with which he hates Toti, Gokal Chand, Thola and Thamman Mal.

In the novel, Bishna goes to meet the vazir (minister). He challenges the vazir, indirectly the establishment, in the way a worrier challenges his enemy in the battle field. Karna challenged Arjuna to a duel by asking him, “Free this listed field to all, Warrior enters by their prowess...” (Dutt 8). In the same way, alone and yet confident, Bishna “looked into the vazir’s eyes with eagle eyes” (25) and challenges:

All right! If there’s justice on this earth, I’ll claim it with all my might….And I shall
bear the brunt of all that befalls on me on this very chest. (28)

Karna is aware of the fact that he cannot attain victory over Arjuna because he has been cursed by his guru Parshurama that he would forget all his skills of warfare when they would be most needed (i.e. on his confrontation with Arjuna on the battlefield). Moreover, he knows that as long as Arjuna has Krishna, the god, by his side, he is invincible. Despite being known to these factors, he refuses to negotiate with Pandavas and challenges Arjuna. This situation proposes a very profound and

---

43 The Punjabi word chaudhary has been derived from the word chaudhar which means leadership or administration. In the context of the novel, chaudharies denote the group of moneylenders who, due to their strong economic background, have great influence on the politics of the region.
intricate philosophy on the part of Karna that he is neither interested in victory nor is he afraid of death or defeat. It is the battle itself that interests him. In other words, the interest of these heroes, whether he is Karna or Ghatotakacha or Bishna, is not in their destinies but in facing the challenges themselves. The thrust of their heroism rests on their struggle against their enemies who are much powerful and generally belong to a higher rank or class. At one place Bishna sings:

Death that strikes fear in every heart

Strikes terror in all …

Bhai, it brings joy to my heart

Death that strikes fear in every heart …

Bishna, in this novel, is aware of the reality and of his position in society. He is familiar with the fact that the moneylenders like Toti, Gokal, Thola and Thamman are supported and assisted by the minister and the government officials and the hope of his victory is minimal. Having been aware of this fact, he thinks it irrelevant to engage a lawyer for his case in the court. He does not even recognize the law of the court because, he thinks, it is only meaningful to them who make it and not for the unhoye like him. He only knows the law of the conscience, the law of right and wrong perceived by his inner-self in the background of self-respect and pride. His heroism resides in his struggle against invincible establishment which he considers only a game:

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

This notion does not imply, in any way, that an establishment is always invincible. Victory over establishment is possible but it demands a collective effort on the part of a large number of people or, change in the form of establishment might appear in many subtle ways which are sometimes not noticeable even. However in the context of Bishna, establishment seems invincible because he lacks the knowledge of any ideological base of his struggle and tactics of group organization.
Bishna, like Karna, is not interested in victory and neither is he afraid of being defeated. He is ready to accept defeat than to bow his head in front of his enemies. “Infact, defeat is not a flaw on the part of a human, it is the other side of victory itself. There is a difference between victory and defeat for the one who does not fight. Victory or defeat is not important for the real fighter; rather, for him fight itself is important. However, the one who is defeated himself ensures the victory of the other”\(^\text{45}\) (Singh, *Gurpam Singh de Unhoye Patar* 57). Bishna and Daya Kaur are such characters who, though themselves defeated, ensure the victory of their opponents. To fight against injustice is their *karma* (action) and consequently their *dharma* (religion) too.

It has also been a typical trait of the mythical heroes to fight with the person who is either equal in strength or, often, more powerful than them. Women are either respected for their maternal powers by these heroes or they have been regarded as a weak counterpart, not fit to fight with. Bishna too, although unconsciously, has adopted this notion from (and have a vague idea of) the stories of his forefathers and for this reason his conscience does not allow him to react against a woman. Subjugated and stirred by this ideology, he does not react against the misconduct of Kartari (the wife of his brother) the way he usually reacts against Toti and Thola Mal’s misbehaviour. However, he picks up a quarrel with the clerk of the court only because he has called him as “*karigara*” and his opponent Toti as “*Seth ji*.” He at once recognizes the biased attitude of the clerk hidden in his way of calling names. He has the sense to smell the ideology of the clerk through which, even before the judgment, he is being treated as a sub-human or inferior to Toti who is being called with respect only because of his financial position in society. On another occasion, he is ready to fight with Surjan Jatt, who is popularly called by the villagers as Surjan *Richh*\(^\text{46}\), only because he has not shown any respect or courtesy when he comes to get the leveler of the plough fixed. Surjan views him only as a submissive labourer, a drudge, but

\(^{45}\) Translated from Punjabi

\(^{46}\) Bear. The people used to call him so because he has an uneven physical structure with an unusual growth of hair on his body.
Bishna, who is full of self-esteem and pluckiness, cannot tolerate it and rebukes him badly as:

Bishna rose to his feet, holding the log in his hands….Bishna walked to the main door, the log on his shoulder, and threw it out into the street. ‘You’d better get out of here. Otherwise I’ll break your ankles. Don’t you ever dare to cross my threshold, understand?’ (171-72)

Despite having such fierce nature, his behaviour towards Kartari is quite different. He acutely experiences the ache of Kartari’s taunting words but does not retort back. When Bishna asks Bhagta, who is sick, whether he has taken medicine, Kartari taunts:

You’ve given us enough to take care of our ailments for the next seven births…And if you aren’t satisfied, you may give us more!...Now, you’d better leave him alone!...If you want him to live, just let him be. Right now, he’s just a skeleton, but if you decide to get him arrested once again, there’d be nothing left of him. You won’t lose anything. Only I would be forced to waste away, knocking at doors, begging to feed my children. (47)

Bishna’s passive behaviour or tolerant attitude towards Kartari is not for the reason that she is the wife of his brother. Rather, Bishna considers it indignity and ignominy on his own part to fight with a woman. His might does not allow him to indulge with a weaker counterpart. He does not have any respect for Kartari still he is bounded by the strength of his character that unconsciously hinders him to fight back.

It should not be misunderstood that for Bishna, women stand for a weaker sex or he thinks them substandard in any way. The example of it can be seen in his behaviour towards his wife Daya Kaur. He is, without any doubt, full of admiration for his wife who herself is his own replica. There is a complete contrast between the dispositions of Kartari and Daya Kaur. Kartari’s approach towards life is of an opportunist. She prevents her husband, whom Bishna and Daya Kaur have nourished like their own son, to have any retaliationship with them. She also forbids her children to go to the house of Bishna but does not raise objection when Budha, sent by Daya Kaur, comes to give her the sack of grain. Akin to Lady Macbeth in the background,
she gives fuel to the ambitions of her husband. She reflects the typical image of Lady Macbeth (an archetypal wicked woman) when she pressurizes her husband to accept the offer that Toti has proposed:

‘What are you waiting for?’ Kartari was overjoyed. ‘Is it easy to make property? If they don’t give up the compound, then we’ll retain their share of this house. And if the deal comes through, after their death we’re going to inherit the compound anyway. Either way, we are the gainers. Don’t you understand? Toti will be happy with his share, and the rest of the land that we get from the sarkaar in New Basti will be ours!’

(160)

Sometimes, this kind of behaviour proffers a risk for the heroes for being misunderstood on the conceptual and ideological level. They can mistakenly be misunderstood by anyone as arrogant, self-centered, proud, high-headed etc. without knowing their other indispensable quality. This quality is their compassionate concern towards the poor, helpless and disadvantaged. Their arrogance and high-headedness is towards a particular class (of oppressors) and for the poor and needy they only have utmost care and concern. Karna never returned any person, especially a vagabond, from his door empty-handed. He even donates his kundala and kavacha (armour which would make him invincible) to Indra, the rain god and the king of heavens, disguised as an old Brahmin. Likewise Dulla Bhatti never troubled any poor person during his life, rather, he used to help them with the money he had looted from the Mughal army and the rich merchants.

In the context of the novel, both Bishna and Daya Kaur show immense concern for their helping-hand Budha, helpless Hetiya and the labourer Kaniya. Daya Kaur treats Budha as her own son and a number of times we can see her compelling Budha to have dinner before going to his village. She also provides shelter to Buta’s children when he goes to the jail. Similarly Bishna’s heart is full of love for his friend Hetiya. He goes to meet him at his place and listens to the hardships Hetiya was undergoing. On another occasion, he goes to give the pushcart to Kaniya, by pushing it himself, to his Kothri47, on the outskirts of the Mandi.

47 A small mud-house containing only single room: usually the living place of a labourer.
Like Bishna, the character of Daya Kaur is also a rare creation of Gurdial Singh. He exhibits an unorthodox image of female in the character of Daya Kaur which reminds us of many Indian mythical figures like Durga, Parvati (the wife of Shiva), Kāli, Chitrangada (the warrior wife of Arjuna) and Kundalini (the goddess of shakti\textsuperscript{48}). Daya Kaur, like Parvati with her husband Shiva, stands with Bishna in every difficult and adverse situation. Irrespective of her biological factors and social limitations, Daya Kaur sometimes surpasses even her husband in courage, bravery, stoicism and intrepidity. She gave birth to six children (five boys and a girl) but unfortunately, within nine years, they all breathed their last. She has not been broken even after the death of her children, rather, she treats Budha, Bhagta, Bhagta’s sons (Kala and Maghi) and Buta’s children as her own children. She, like the mother goddess or universal mother, is the mother of all who come to her premises dejected. She not only gives shelter to Buta and his children but also protects them at every front of life (when Buta is away from home) like a lioness protecting her cubs. Despite being issueless, she is the incarnation of universal motherhood. She efficiently plays the role of a mother for Kala and Maghi (the sons of Bhagta and Kartari) even more seriously than their own mother. Therefore Daya Kaur, for her uncommon maternal qualities, symbolizes the image of Ma Durgā or Mā Kāli (the Hindu goddesses).

Kāli, as a goddess and a mythical figure, possesses dual connotation: first, she is the goddess of destruction, violence, bloodshed and second, she has been attributed as maa (mother). In the second role she is the protector of those who come to her to take shelter in any trouble. Her method to protect her subjects is not based on paranormal hypnotism but is of an aggressive and truculent warrior. Daya Kaur reflects her image on many occasions in the discourse when she adopts violent behaviour to protect her subjects.

Along with her maternal traits, we come cross another mode of Daya Kaur’s existence and that is her fierce nature (Shakti). She is an embodiment of shakti not only

\textsuperscript{48} Shakti literally means “energy” but in the context of Hindu mythology it denotes the internal energy of a being. It is like a life giving force and the base of all other energies. Any human being, who learns to regulate his internal energies, can attain immense strength or supernatural powers too.
on superficial level but she actually executes it over her enemies. In Hindu mythology “The devi (goddess) is presented as fulfilling many different roles: at a rudimentary level, she is shown as a maternal village divinity, then as the wife of Shiva and in a relatively auxiliary mode as the wife of other great gods. These feminine figures cannot be truly understood without the attachment of the notion of Shakti. The vedic word Shakti (energy) designates the energy personified in the spouse of Indra, god of war and thunder who is the chief god in the vedic pantheon” (Takhar).

Like Parvati, Daya Kaur provides ideological and emotional strength to her husband who himself is full of shakti. She also reminds us of the image of Kāli when she enters a state of hysterical fits. “She started rolling her eyes and head, with her hair wild open…she started cursing everyone she could think of – right from Thola to thanedar, from the judge to the government” (104-05). Kāli, the goddess of destruction, destroys only to recreate. She is the destroyer of sins prevailing on this earth in the form of danavas and also the consort of the god Shiva. In myths, it is Shiva who destroys the world, and Kāli is the power or energy with which Shiva acts. Therefore Kāli is Shiva’s shakti, without which Shiva could not act (“Kali”). In the context of the novel, Daya Kaur and Bishna reflect the images of Kāli and Shiva respectively. Daya Kaur, like Kāli, is the source of energy for her husband who is ready to fight with the whole world against injustice. He is the destroyer of all those values and laws which have been constructed by society to repress helpless poor people. He deconstructs the notions in which authorities are generally regarded as unchallengeable. Daya Kaur not only encourages and stands with Bishna but herself comes at the forefront to fight in his absence. No one dares to enter the house as long as Daya Kaur is there. During the fits, her untied hair, red eyes and wild gestures indubitably make her the replica of Kāli and her roars are intolerable to Toti and Thola. At one place when Toti comes to claim his hata Daya Kaur roars:

‘Wretched dog! When you used to fall at our feet to take care of this place, it was just soil and now it’s turned gold, isn’t it? … Get lost, pio deya saleya!’ Daya Kaur raised the shaft in her hand to hit him. (76)
The role of Daya Kaur is multifarious. On the one hand she is a loving and caring mother who acts as a benevolent protector of her subjects and, on the other hand, she reflects the archetypal images of Durgā and Kāli, who are known and worshipped for their *shakti* and wrath. The example of it can be seen in the incident when Thola Singh comes to sympathize with Daya Kaur in a hypocritical manner after sending Bishna to the jail:

The minute he [Thola] asked after Bishna, she thundered, ‘Son of a bitch! What have you come here for? After throwing a burning matchstick into our haystack, now you want to step back and watch the spectacle?’ Thola recoiled on dread. He had never heard a woman scream so loudly. He lost his nerve and started muttering, ‘I was…I was… Daya Kauré, I was ust trying to …’ ‘Rascal, who do you think you are? Just get lost or I’ll chew you alive!’ Grinding her teeth, Daya Kaur let out a piercing cry. Thola froze.

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

‘Who … me?’

‘Bastard, who else?’ Daya Kaur swirled the pestle in the air. Thola immediately stepped back. Pushed against the back door, he let out a sudden squeal. (102-03)

The manifestation of *shakti* in the persona of Daya Kaur is both practical and supernatural or, in other words, symbolic. Symbolic in the sense that she creates an image (scarecrow) of Thola in her house and discharges her anger over it. The scarecrow is not only an image of Thola, instead it represents the whole class of chaudharies. Daya Kaur used to beat it five times with her broken shoe. The function of this act of her is the invocation of fury and abhorrence which she desires to sustain till she is alive. While analyzing the novel at surface level, the cries of Daya Kaur seem shallow and meaningless because they do not practically affect for whom they are intended i.e. the chaudharies. But on the deeper level, they are the cries of resistance of an individual against one’s oppression. These cries keep on jolting the consciousness of chaudharies by generating mysterious fears in them. This is the
reason that the ladies of her colony, Budha, Bhagta, and Buta do not dare to question her. Bishna enjoys this form of Daya Kaur because he himself belongs to the same ilk.

The source of energy of Daya Kaur has been drawn from her way of living which is harmonized with the asperity of the soil of Punjab and particularly of Malwa region. The hardships of the physical environment of the area where she lives is reflected in her conduct and behaviour. She gets hysterical fits frequently and expresses all the content that is there in her conscious and unconscious mind. In the discourse, it depicts the condition of physical and mental state of an individual (Daya Kaur) who is in revolt against the exploiters (Thola, Toti, Gokal and Thamman) and her environment. She is fierce and violent, suffers herself but continue to go on like this till she is satisfied.

After analysing the characters of Bishna and Daya in different mythological contexts, we can confer that Bishna is such an individual who is surrounded by many institutions which are misanthropic in nature and, in various forms, very commanding too. Bishna, reflecting the incarnation of heroism, is standing on a paralyzed pedestal along with his courageous wife and a few helpless friends like Hetiya and Kaniya. Daya kaur stands with her husband in his fight against what he believes “wrong.” “Wrong” for them is wrong no matter whether it is done against them, Hetiya, Kaniya or any other helpless being. The path they take for the confrontation is of fighting and aggression. Trotting on this path, they reflect many mythical figures like Karna and Ghatotkacha (in the character of Bishna), Kāli and Parvati (in the character of Daya Kaur) and actions all the way through their vigorous conduct and unusual heroic behaviour.

**Bishna as an Existential Hero**

Existentially, the definition of heroism would enclose all those notions which are based on one’s subjectivity, central position, freedom of choice and the most important, the actions of an individual in different situations. Since existentialism does not proffer any difference between the genders, the heroic figure can be a male or
female, depending on the actions and the situations. The hero must possess a strong subjectivity through which he becomes able to achieve and sustain the central position in a given situation. This central position often plays the role of a hole in which all other beings lose their subjectivity and enter, at least on conceptual level, the state of an object, the state of being–in–itself, having no conscience and control over the situation. Hence, as a controller of the situation, a hero often gets applause on the basis of morality, justice, endurance and courage even from them over whom he asserts his subjectivity. In order to attain this position, he has to go through a number of actions, choosing freely from a wide range of contradictory possibilities.

Death or defeat does not necessarily hinder one’s subjectivity, rather, it sometimes help making the actions more meaningful than itself. All these things collectively formulate a particular mode of being, the course of one’s existence which often fundamentally remains, with little variations from culture to culture, analogous. Sometimes dialectical relations are also possible between a hero and the mediating third or the others but mostly, with the powerful subjectivity and the monotonous control over the situation, these relations are weakened to such an extent that they appear insignificant in the totalization of the situation. For instance, in the context of Punjabi culture, a number of legendary heroes like Jeona Maur, Dulla Bhatti, Sucha Surma, Jagga Daku, Mirza and patriotic heroes (like Udham Singh, Kartar Singh Srbha and Bhagat Singh) have got applause and acknowledgement due to their unrivaled actions. They, with all temporal and spatial variations, remained at the centre of their situations and never lost their subjectivity in front of their opponents. They created their own world by adopting a particular mode of being which, at that time, was quite different from the mode of beings adopted by the common populace.

Looking from the existential point of view, the conceptualization of heroism, thus, seems to be based on the fact how an individual chooses to stroll about one’s life. To select one’s mode of living also implies that there are some other possible ways to lead one’s life. These modes of living can be numerous depending upon one’s choice or decisions which also can vary in degree or form from individual to individual. Sartre, here, seems justified when he says, “Existence precedes essence” which means, “first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and only afterwards, defines
himself. If man, as existentialist conceives him, is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterward will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be” (Sartre, *Existentialism* 15).

Although there are many possible ways to lead one’s life yet there are some particular ways of living, which have been acknowledged and appreciated by large number of people of a particular culture. The being that follows these ways is generally considered superior in degree and manner to his fellow beings. And this persona is usually termed as hero. When we analyze the character of the protagonist of *The Survivors* in the light of existentialism, we immediately recognize his different mode of living which, even if looks abnormal sometimes, is certainly heroic.

In *The Survivors*, the mode of being adopted by Bishna is quite different from all other characters of the novel. From the beginning to the end of the novel, the central position belongs to him. His consciousness manifestly dominates the discourse of the novel. His mode of being is the result of his own decisions and all other characters of the novel, except Daya Kaur and Maghi, are unable to understand it. They think Bishna either a fool or non-existent (“unhoye”). Through this different and difficult mode of being, Bishna has succeeded in making his distinctive place among the protagonists of Punjabi literature.

To analyze *The Survivors* from the point of view of existentialism is appropriate because the novel poses the question of existence of an individual who passes through many hardships and unfavourable conditions. First of all, let us consider the very title of the novel that is *Unhoye* (as used by the author) or *The Survivors* (as used in the translation). According to Jasbir Jain, the title *The Survivors* (given by the translator) is not appropriate. She writes in her book, *Beyond Postcolonialism: Dreams and Realities of a Nation*:

> It is always difficult to convey the cultural nuances to the non-cultural reader: non-familiarity is seen with suspicion. The rootedness of language in the beliefs of the people renders translation difficult and unsatisfactory for translation, at times, goes for the meaning and not the poetic undertones. For instance the title of Gurdial Singh’s novel *Unhoye* has been translated as *Survivors* while *Unhoye* would be closer to *The Non-Existent or Those Who Never Were*. (236)
It is true that ‘Unhoye’ literally means ‘non-existents’. The title carries a very deep existential irony in the question: who are non-existents? Bhagta, the brother of Bishna, regards him (Bishna), Daya Kaur (Bishna’s wife) and, up to some extent, his own son Maghi as non-existents. They are non-existents, according to Bhagta, because they have given their lives without a cause, or in other words, the reason for their deaths was not appropriate. It does not matter to him and all other people, whether they actually existed or not. But after analyzing the situation objectively, one would come to know that it is Bhagta himself who is non-existent. He can feel the presence of Bishna even after his death. Therefore, the translator (Rana Nayar) probably has got success in giving the title “The Survivors” (and hence maintaining the irony) because even after their deaths, the non-existents manage to “survive” in the memories of those who are alive. Bhagta finds himself unable to negate the mental image of Bishna which still dominates his consciousness. He even fears to pass by the place which reminds him of Bishna. Even if Bishna is not physically there, yet his untiring subjectivity dominates the situation. The presence of his image in the unconscious of the other characters of the novel fills them with a mysterious terror. This unchallenging subjectivity and consistent dominance of the situation certainly proves him superior to the other beings in the discourse and, hence, makes him a heroic figure.

The state of being adopted by Bishna is according to his own freedom of choice through which he tries to maintain his pride and dignity. He does not feel comfortable in the prevailing economic, political and judicial system and rebels against them on individual level. While passing through this state of rebellion, he nowhere looses his subjectivity and central position as a master of the situation. Bishna, being obstinate and immovable, never crosses the threshold to come into a state of **being-for-others**. His consciousness dominates the discourse from the beginning to the end of the novel.

The first incident with which we come to know about Bishna’s domineering subjectivity is when he is being taken out of his house by the policemen along with his wife Daya Kaur and his brother, Bhagta. Bishna, raising the roaring battle cry “Jo Bole So Nihal…….. Sat Shri Akal” many a times, steers the situation and dominates the
consciousness of all others who are present there, including the policemen even. Though arrested by the police, his behaviour and actions are of a freeman which remain constant throughout the novel. On the other hand, his own brother has been objectified by the others or in Sartre’s parlance he is caught in the “looked at” position. The narrator, very artfully, introduces us to two different modes of being through this incident. Bhagta has been described as, “His brother looked pale and listless” (18) while he (Bishna) walks stoutly in high spirits.

Both of them (Bishna and Bhagta) are at the same physical and social level but on the conceptual level, the position from where they perceive the outside world, their behaviour and modes of being are contradictory. The one, Bhagta, concedes himself a culprit, guilty, and a conscience-stricken being because others (the police and the people) consider him to be in that mode. He is being “looked at” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 258) as the culprit of the situation because he himself acknowledges it. The other, Bishna is in “looking position,” a subjective face, from where he is able to negate the gaze of the others by asserting his dominance. He is joined in by his wife who supports and acknowledges his central position by raising a battle cry in response. The impact of Bishna’s subjectivity can be noticed by the reaction of the onlookers as:

Although, by now, people were used to such processions, there was something strange and uncanny about this particular one. And it cast a shadow of fear on the faces of the onlookers that lingered till the battle cries died down. (19)

After returning from the custody on bail, Bishna goes to meet the vazir in the *Pandal*. Instead of pleading for his lost house, he deliberately and sarcastically makes poignant remarks on the corrupt system of the courts and also on the role of the hypocrite bureaucracy. He does not lose his subjectivity at any point when arguing with the authorities, rather, makes them feel his irresistible dominating presence:

This time round, Bishna spoke somewhat peevishly… The vazir virtually broke into sweat. And the officials started shaking his legs as though stung by a wasp. Then he covered his mouth and coughed rather suggestively, glowering at Bishna all this while. But Bishna’s gaze was now fixed upon the vazir’s face…. Until today, no petitioner had ever dared to speak to him in this manner. (27)
It does not matter to Bishna with whom he is talking. It may be a common person (like Budha or Kaniya) or a vazir, an administrator or inspector, he reduces every being in front of him to the state of \textit{being– in–itself}, an inanimate being, a thing among other things.

Sartre asserts that it was during the war when he discovered the philosophical significance of social relations. He elaborates these ideas of interpersonal relations, totalization and praxis–process in his well-known book \textit{Critique of Dialectical Reason}. In fact, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, with its emphasis on the looking/looked-at, subjective/objective, central/marginal models of interpersonal relations, was incapable of explaining the positive reciprocity, collective action, and unintended consequences that a social philosophy requires. “Sartre, further, breaks the barrier that confined his earlier book \textit{Being and Nothingness} to psychology by introducing the concepts of dialectical praxis, the practicoinert and the mediating third. Together, they account for the dialectical enrichment of individual praxis by group praxis that bears properly social predicates such as rights/duties, powers, the function of different institutions while simultaneously preserving the freedom and responsibility of the individual” (Gupta 43). Sartre’s concept of dialectical praxis is at the same time reflective and different from Bakhtin’s concept of dialectics in the sense that Sartre’s concept is based on individual praxis, the role of individual in the totalization of one’s situation and the interpersonal relations with and within committed groups in the form of a mediating third.

Bishna, as an individual and as a social agent for committed groups, reduces the possibility of dialectical praxis with his compelling subjectivity on physical as well as conceptual level. As long as Bishna’s conscious-self is there, his subjectivity is prevailing, no congenial relation is possible between him and the establishment – consequently the situation remains predominantly single-sided. Due to his inflexible subjectivity, his actions are not acknowledged by any other character in the discourse except his wife Daya Kaur.
When he was arrested by the police, all his belongings were handed over to the Chaudharies. After getting bail, he goes to take his belongings back from Gokal. His words, said with irony and anger together, reduce Gokal to a dumb being, a being-in-itself, and a non–existent in front of him. Bishna even reminds him of collective responsibility by symbolically asserting his intentions and his mode of being as:

But Chaudharia! When human beings are at their worst, even god is wary. You know how innocent a calf is, but when out of control, it is worse than a raging bull.

Symbolically, the innocent calf can be compared with Bishna while the raging bull is the establishment. Bishna, though considered a politically naïve, seems to be aware of the totalization of the situation: by being aware of the subjective and objective self simultaneously and the complex relation between them. Here, the discussion of the example of a boxer given by Sartre in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* would be imperative for understanding the situation. According to Sartre, most of the time a boxer is aware of what he is doing (in so far as what he does is the on-going realization of his project, and not in so far as his act is an event which develops also in the autonomy of the objective milieu), but he has trouble in totalizing what his adversary is doing. He is too busy thwarting the latter’s tactics to be able to reconstitute his strategy (it is his manager who carries out this totalization on his behalf and communicate to him between rounds). If he is not too clearly dominated, he often even believes himself the subject of the fight and scarcely feels the blows: he is amazed to learn that he has been defeated on points. Hence, the intelligibility of the boxer lies in understanding the situation objectively while losing his subjective viewpoint (10). In the similar way, Bishna is aware of the real situation and his position in society. He acknowledges the strength of the establishment when he denies hiring a lawyer to argue his case in the court. But at the same time, he holds his subjectivity and inflicts it over the other characters, just like the way he is imposing it on Gokal. The relation between the objective knowledge of the situation and his own subjectivity, while simultaneously understanding the relation between the both, provides him with the dominating central position.
The conflict of Bishna with the establishment is, first and foremost, on the conceptual level while the mechanism he adopts is of overt and brutal confrontation. When Toti comes to claim his hata, which he has given to them on request earlier, Bishna’s ways of holding his position is indistinguishable:

...If you’re planning to get the compound vacated, you may leave... if you have the muscles, we also know how to dig our heels in. Get out... (76).

It is important to note that Bishna asserts his subjectivity over the persons with whom he is conceptually at fight or over those who try to become the part of the establishment. In the later half of the novel, Bhagta tries to become the part of the establishment against whom Bishna is fighting. Unconsciously he knows what Bishna is doing is right. That is why even if Bishna is not physically present, his mental image dominates the consciousness of Bhagta and he finds himself unable to resist it. In the court, the way Bishna answers the administrator, Bhagta feels dizzy and angry (though unconsciously he knows what Bishna has done and still doing is right and judicious) but he does not have the courage to oppose Bishna consciously. He at once genuflects when he confronts the compelling subjectivity of Bishna:

Bhagta was furious with himself. The administrator had asked him over and over again, but god knows why he repeatedly said, ‘Huzoor, whatever my bhai says is right.’ It was as if Bishna’s presence in the court had frozen his senses. He didn’t even know when the court proceedings had begun and when they had got over. (84)

Buta, who is an active member of Parja Mandal, regards Bishna as his mentor. “He had been to jail several times, and on many occasions, badly beaten up by the police... As soon as he returned from the jail, he would come straight to Bishna” and touch his feet in order to get his blessing. This act of Buta corroborates the superiority of Bishna as a subject, a preferred hero. Buta has been depicted in the discourse as being considerably aware of the political and social systems because of his relations with Parja Mandal. His politically conscious attitude differentiates him from the other characters of the novel. His salutation to Bishna is actually a salutation to the concept
of freedom which is synonymous with the mode of being chosen by him (Bishna). Buta is an assiduous adherent of freedom, and under the effect of which he is ready to do anything. He even pays no attention to his house and the upbringing of his children for the sake of his struggle against authorities for freedom. “Whenever he went to jail, his children would go around knocking on the neighbors’ doors for months on end. His oxen and mill suffered, and his house wore a desolate look” (91). The person who values freedom even more than his children and house could only be a disciple of Bishna because he is an incarnation of absolute freedom at every front of life. That is why Bishna is full of love and admiration for Buta and his ways of living. The concept of slavery does not exist in the conscious as well as unconscious of Bishna. He asks, “Butea, what’s this slavery you’re talking about?” (93).

Throughout the novel, he advocates absolute freedom; whether it is on individualistic, economic, political or social level. The house given by his brother, though it was actually his (Bishna’s) own share, as a favour and the chappatis given by Kartari thinking him a burden are not acceptable to him because they throttle his mode of being as a self–esteemed free man. This serene and courageous nature, through which he maintains his subjectivity, has further been explored when thanedar and Toti come to lock hata:

Once the inky darkness descended, the policemen quietly got up, picked up her (Daya Kaur’s) manji gently and left it in the middle of the street. Under the open sky. Daya Kaur lay, unconscious, bundled up in one corner of the manji….He kept it out in the street and locked up the house…. ‘So have you done your worst, havaldara?’ They had barely covered a distance of ten feet, when they saw Bishna coming in…. ‘Why don’t you have something to eat or drink? Besides, you’ll get to see what more I have in store for you,’ Bishna said in the same vein, a quite smile on his face…. After a few unsure steps, all four of them froze in their tracks. Rummaging through a heap of tools in the dark, Bishna found a hammer and hollering a battle cry, he brought it crashing down upon the lock, which split open like a muskmelon. With another battle cry, he threw the door wide open. Looking at them, Bishna burst out laughing and then shouted at the top of his voice, ‘Come on in, why don’t you? I’ll go inside and warm up some milk for you.’ They stood there for a while, and finally, left. (144)
The next step that Bishna takes towards the transitional phase of his being to becoming is to leave the *hata* and to move to his village. The scene of leaving the compound (*hata*) and *Mandi* is very touchy and full of heroism. Bishna returns from the jail in the evening, asks Daya Kaur about her health and casually asks her to leave that *hata*. The indifference shown by Bishna, and the way Daya Kaur steadfastly stands with him, incredibly advocates the rare mode of being adopted by both of them. The decision to leave the *hata* is their own, the exercise of their free will. The significant thing here is that Bishna goes to the jail and fights for the same reason: for not leaving the possession of the *hata* when asked by Toti and Government Officials. But when his own brother offers him to live there (in the same *hata*), Bishna denies. The reason behind it is that Bhagta has got this house (after exchanging his allotted house in the new colony with Toti) as a compensation for their lost house and Bishna cannot tolerate it. His own brother fails to understand the “intelligibility” of his (Bishna’s) struggle. Bishna, who is not only difficult but impossible to be objectified, once again proves to be the dominator of the situation by asserting his own decision according to his conscience, his free will.

Towards the end of the novel, Bishna tells a story to Duttar (Santu’s son). In the story, a prince has a dream in which a *sadhu* (saint) asks him about his wish and the prince replies, “I wish that nobody should interfere with what I do. And I should be able to do whatever I want” (179). *Sadhu* grants him his wish and asks him to ride towards the East. He will get whatever he wants on the way, and whatever he will throw anywhere shall turn into the thing of his desire. Then he will reach a hill top where a city of gold and silver will be situated, a land of fairies and he will become the king of that city. But if he will turn to look back, every thing he has created all along the way shall remain as it is, but the fairy land and the city of gold shall vanish and if he returns to his father’s kingdom, every thing he has created will also be burned to ashes. The prince starts the journey and goes on creating gardens, rivers, mountains, the palaces of gold and silver, and finally reaches that city of fairyland. But he could not resist himself from looking backward to see the world he has created on his way. He sacrifices the fairyland only to take a glance of his created foot-prints. At this
position he has two options. One, he would return to the kingdom of his father because he has already sacrificed the fairyland; second, he would sacrifice his life in order to preserve the world created by him on the way. He chooses the latter one. By choosing death, he does not negate his existence but his existence is preserved in his actions. His identity is determined by his actions, which are without any doubt heroic in every sense, and he himself is responsible for this. He acknowledges his actions because they are wider than the life itself. Bishna too compares his own actions and freedom of choice with the decision of the prince. He seems to justify the heroic decision of the prince by reflecting:

‘Wah, Oye Shera!’ rolled off Bishna’s tongue, as if he was looking at the prince standing on the hilltop, and patting his back. ‘May your mother be blessed for giving birth to a son like you!’ Bishna spoke louder than before, running his hand through his beard, and after some time, has eyes shut on their own….For the first time, Bishna looked back at his life that seemed to stretch as far as the Milky Way. Childhood, youth and old age – a complete journey beyond which only the fairyland existed. Like the prince in the story, he too wanted to turn back and see the impressions of his footprints, even if it meant losing the fairyland and plunging into a pit of darkness. From the day he had gained consciousness to the day he left the Mandi, he had built whatever he had wanted on either side of his track. And whatever he didn’t like, he had simply pulled down and destroyed. All the same, he had left behind his footprints upon those rough, misshapen pathways. But now for the past ten or twelve years, he felt, as if he had been standing on the hilltop, just looking at the world he had both created and destroyed. (184-85)

When Bishna desires to see his foot-prints, he does not want to recreate his world, rather he wants to feel proud of what he has done. He does not long to modify the purpose and nature of his actions, instead, he wants to acknowledge them. Akin to the prince, he himself is ready to sacrifice his life just to take a glance of his actions.

In the later part of the novel, Maghi becomes the spokesperson of this philosophy of being in action. He is quite like the prince who wants to live a life of actions, creates his own world according to the freedom of his will, and is also ready to sacrifice his life which, according to him, is meaningless without actions. He has his own world, his own individual praxis like Bishna. Maghi is a replica of the prince who
prefers his self-created world instead of returning to the world created by his father. Maghi too denies the mode of being and the world of his father, Bhagta, and wants to carve his own way.

The character of Maghi, as portrayed in the discourse, is symbolical. In the novel, Bishna has been introduced in his middle age. His childhood and adolescence have been symbolically depicted through the character of Maghi. Maghi’s way of talking, his steady hatred towards the establishment, his brave and stoic attitude – all reflect Bishna’s own image. This is the reason that Bishna loves Maghi more than anyone else in the discourse and also acknowledges his actions. Like Bishna, Maghi too possesses a commanding subjectivity and he has the same zeal to attain the central position as his taya (Bishna) has. He wants to burn like a candle rather than to smoulder passively:

You must do something, anything!.... Whether you work or do mischief, study or play, become a minister or a criminal, perform great deeds or just go around castrating dogs, you must do your best. This is how you must live, create your own tracks and leave your footprints so that the world remembers you....Is there any point in living so long that you simply drag yourself on your knees, and survive on nothing else but dalia?....You should rather burn like a lamp and spread light around! Instead of struggling like a burnt out wick, turn into a leaping flame! (221-22)

Although these words have been spoken by Maghi, yet they corroborate the philosophy of the life of his taya, Bishna. Maghi here symbolizes Bishna’s own adolescence.

On the part of a lay man, it is very easy and common practice to relate the conceptualization of a tragedy to the sufferings of the hero and an unexplainable sympathy automatically turns up with the one who suffers. But for Camus and the other existentialists, the relationship between a man’s sufferings and his tragedy is not so simple and obligatory. According to them, sufferings become tragic only when one becomes conscious of happiness, and not of the sufferings. Camus analyses the Myth of Sisyphus and argues, “…happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth. They are inseparable.” He further says, “I fancy Sisyphus returning towards his rock, and the sorrow was in the beginning. When the images of earth cling too tightly to memory,
when the call of happiness becomes too insistent, it happens that melancholy rises in man’s heart…” (77). At present there is no sorrow because Sisyphus is not conscious of happiness, or in other words, the call of happiness is no more. “A face that toils so close to stones is already a stone itself! …. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn” (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 76-77).

If we probe intellectually the character of Bishna in the light of this philosophy of Camus, we find that he too, like Sisyphus, is toiling against the establishment which is, he consciously knows, futile. As the Sisyphus keeps the rock rolling, Bishna continues fighting against his circumstances and injustice. He, of course, is angry with what is happening around him but, at heart, he is not a grief–stricken man. He never laments over his condition nor does he curse himself for being a part of it. Happiness does not insist his being to be in a state of grief the way it does for an ordinary man. He is happy and satisfied with his struggle because “the struggle itself toward the heights (in case of Sisyphus) is enough to fill a man’s heart” (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 78). Bishna is certainly a modern Sisyphus, an undisputable hero, who makes his struggle more meaningful than his existence. We must not imagine him a tragic character or a man-in-grief but an existential being, the hero and controller of the situation, whose way of living is freely chosen by him even if it is full of hardships and hopeless struggle.