Chapter IV

*Night of the Half Moon: A Heroic Journey of a Peasant*

*Night of the Half Moon* is Gurdial Singh’s fifth novel which was published after *Kuwela* in 1972. Like many other novels, this novel got immense appreciation from its readers and also remained, for quite a long period, the centre of discussion among the notable literary critics of its time. The novel got Sahitya Akademi Award and Nanak Singh Novelist Award in 1975 for its literary merits. On the surface level, it presents the story of a feud between two agrarian families of rural Punjab. However on the deeper level, it peeps into the real Punjabi life explored through different cultural and social metaphors. The story compels its readers to re-think and re-organize the traditional value systems about suffering, justice, murder and punishment. It also throws light on the transcending nature of human relationships which, more or less, have been shown based on personal priorities rather than sticking to the traditional familial system. The novel subtly re-defines the institution of marriage which, rather than being based on love and understanding, is shown footing on the financial condition of the subject.

The plot of the novel breaks the chronological sequence and frequently keeps moving in past and future. The narration begins with the description of the psychological state of the protagonist Modan at the time when he is coming back to his village after completing fourteen years of imprisonment. On his way back, he is trying to gather different images from his past especially of his life in the village before going to the prison. He sometimes feels nostalgic about his friends with whom he has developed good relations in the prison during his sentence. A peculiar kind of melancholy is dominating his mind and under this effect he does not bother to answer the affectionate questions of his fellow traveler. He reaches his village in the darkness of night and observes that old mud-houses have been replaced by new bricked houses. He gets cold reception at his own house by his younger brother and his family and also finds that during his absence his brothers have reconstructed some portion of the old
The new house fails to exalt his heart when he sees his mother in a pathetic condition forced to live in the dark old portion of the house by his younger brothers. Modan tells his mother his wish to move to their old house which is situated on a mound outside the village but she does not give any positive response.

The narration then turns analeptic and goes back to explore the causes for which Modan was imprisoned. Modan’s father Pala was a simple, meek and honest farmer. He lived in a house outside the village along with his wife and three sons Modan, Sajjan, and Chhottu. He was a harmless person and did not indulge in any scuffle with anyone during his life. There was another farmer named Ghana in the village who had a tussle with Pala’s family because Pala’s Taaya Sauna had stood against Ghana’s father who was trying to grab the land of his two cousins by unfair means. Trapping Pala in a false case, Ghana got him insulted and arrested by the police in front of the whole village. After a false trial, Pala was sent to the jail for one and a half years. Pala, too weak to bear the insult, took all this matter to his mind so seriously that it proved fatal for him and as a result he died. The whole village covertly criticized the act of Ghana but no one dared speak it openly. This incident created a deep and drastic impact on the teenager mind of Modan and he could not forget the insult of his parents (Modan’s mother was also openly abused, insulted and beaten up by the police) thereafter. After the death of his father, he took the responsibility of the entire household on his shoulders. Approximately after two and half years, one night Modan felt very restless and went to meet his friends Sheri and Gyala and Taaya Lallu. They aggravated the inner trauma of Modan by giving reference to the prestige and bravery of his lineage and injustice done against his family. It was now impossible for Modan to control himself and in frenzy he murdered Ghana near his fields. It was only Ruldu, Modan’s friend, who came openly to defend the action of Modan by calling him true to the heroic culture of Punjab. Ghana’s family filed a case against the whole family of Modan including his two younger brothers. The case was withdrawn against two younger brothers of Modan for the compensation of half of the land of Modan’s family. Modan was imprisoned for fourteen long years.

49 The elder brother of one’s father
The story then returns to its previous sequence. Modan goes to meet his old friend Ruldu at his house and spends that night there. Ruldu tells him about the friendship between his brother Sajjan and the sons of Ghana. Modan opens his heart to Ruldu and tells him that it is now impossible for him to stay with his brothers in their house. Next morning, taking Ruldu along with him, Modan starts repairing the old house situated on the mound outside of the village. He brings his mother with him to that house. Gradually, he learns that his youngest brother Chhottu is not happy with Sajjan because of his friendship with the sons of Ghana. But due to economic dependence and his own weakness of character, he (Chhottu) is not able to fight against him (Sajjan). When he comes to know that Sajjan has shared a tubewell with the sons of Ghana, he decides to separate his share of land from his brothers. The field which was earlier irrigated by the shared-tubewell (which is jointly shared by Sajjan and Ghana’s sons) now comes under Modan’s possession. He considers it undignified to take the water from the tubewell that has any connection with the sons of Ghana. He is ready to get his crop wilt for want of water but he is not ready to irrigate his land “with that blood-spattered water” (82).

Modan passes through a great financial crisis because during the division of land, house and the tools of agriculture, he generously has given the lion’s share to his brothers. Ruldu helps him financially to buy a bull to plough his land. He also arranges a wife for Modan by mortgaging his own land. Modan takes some time to adjust with his wife Dani and to accept his step son Gelu⁵⁰. But after some time he starts living peacefully with them.

Meanwhile Chhottu starts coming to meet Modan regularly and tells him the minute details about the intensifying closeness between Sajjan and the sons of Ghana. Everytime when the news comes about their friendship, it causes pain in his heart and he would remain upset for many days. One day Chhottu comes and tells Modan that Sajjan is insisting him to do co-operative farming with the sons of Ghana. The real

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⁵⁰ Gelu is Daani’s son from her previous husband.
cause behind this intimacy is that Sajjan is having illegal relationship with the wife of one of Ghana’s sons. This infuriates Modan but because of his mother’s pleadings, he somehow controls himself. After some time, Dani’s brother comes and takes her along with him with the promise that he would leave Dani back after few days. Without Dani, the house once again appears desolate to Modan. Dani does not return for many days.

After few days Chhottu comes and tells Modan that one of the Ghana’s sons has shouted out at him forbidding him to take cart across their unplanted field. This time it was very difficult for Modan to control himself. In the evening he goes to meet Ruldu at his house and they consume some liquor. Modan, instead of going to his home, goes straight to Ghana’s house and openly challenges them. Sajjan was there at that time. In the scuffle, Modan gets a mortal wound on his leg by his own brother. Ruldu shields and takes him to his house injured. Local hakims\(^\text{51}\) try to treat the wound but it does not help Modan to get well. Ruldu goes to enquire about Dani who has not returned yet and brings the news that her greedy uncle has sold her to another man. It was the deadliest set-back to the conscience of Modan from which it is very difficult for him to recover. His health deteriorates day-by-day. When he is on his last legs, his brother comes and apologizes for his mistake. Dani too comes to see him and Modan dies soon after. Ruldu takes a vow to avenge the death of his friend.

After contemplating the plot of the novel thoroughly, the conceptualizations which above all catch our attention are justice, personal dignity and honour, murder, suffering and loneliness. In the paradigm of deconstruction and “hyperreality,” distinctions between real and imagined, reality and illusion, surface and depth have been eroded (Barry 87). Therefore it is difficult to call the meanings of the above mentioned conceptualizations universal or static. Without going to the extreme ends like deconstructionists\(^\text{52}\), we would limit our ideas to the point that the meanings of the

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\(^{51}\) Local medical practitioner who uses herbs to cure diseases

\(^{52}\) Deconstructionists believe that there is only a free play of the words and the absolute meaning of a text is not possible at all. For them, language is not a reliable medium of knowledge and if we try to
conceptualizations keep changing according to the context and culture of a particular region. It would then be imperative if we try to locate the meanings of like justice, dignity and honour, murder, suffering and loneliness (which have been highlighted in Night of the Half Moon) according to the culture of Punjab.

Modan’s Fight against Injustice: An Issue of Self-Respect

Justice, as an idea and concept, in itself, is a very complex matter. In earlier times, when god was considered the starting point of everything, the unique source of existence as well as its destiny, the meaning of justice was not as difficult to approach as it is in the contemporary era. Religion, with all his morality integrated, served as the judgment point against whom the actions of human beings were evaluated. Religion was the guiding principle behind all the judgments made by some influenced human beings on the actions of other humans on its name. It was quite similar to the concept of touchstone given by Matthew Arnold in the context of evaluating literature i.e. by comparing the literary works to that of the masters of literature. Arnold designated these masters (like Dante, Shakespeare, Milton and so on) as gods of literature against whose works any piece of literature could be evaluated (by comparing them), and thus virtually deciding its merits and demerits. In this way, the option to achieve merits nearly like that of masters’ was possible but the option of surpassing them was not available. God also enjoyed this position for a long time in the matter of justice because of his incontestable superiority over human beings.

As long as religion remained the exclusive inspiration behind any judgment made to evaluate human actions, justice, however simplified its form may be, was logically proved as injustice in one or many other different ways. For instance, if someone murdered one’s father, he was not expected to do the same. And if he did so, he was considered more serious criminal than the earlier. He was often consolidated with the idea that god himself would punish the culprit in the form that he will not be locate the meaning of a text we indulge ourselves into the labyrinth of signifiers until we reach at the dead end i.e. aporia.
conferred salvation. In this way religion taught us to accept and not to react. The reaction was solely considered as the religion’s part and not of humans. “The essence of His [god’s] doctrine is summed up in total consent and in non-resistance to evil. Thou shall not kill, even to prevent killing. The world must be accepted as it is, nothing must be added to its unhappiness, but you must consent to suffer personally from the evil it contains” (Camus, *The Rebel* 60). Religion preached one, however pathetic condition he may be in, to live according to His will. Oppression was not seen as created by humans but it was believed a natural process designed by god himself as an integral part of the universe.

It was only after the enlightenment, the birth of reason and logic in the matter of existence that the position of god was challenged. Nietzsche, who metamorphosed the purpose of human existence on this earth, declared the possibility of existence without the concept of god. Nietzsche, with his ilk, reduced the identity of god to a mere psychological illusion. All the values regarding salvation and eternity died as soon as the death of god was declared. In this god-free world, man is believed either having salvation in advance or he is not interested in it at all. He no longer waits anyone for his salvation rather he knows that he himself has the power to negate his existence at any time. As far as life itself has lost meaning (or at least humans are still unconvinced about it), how can death or salvation has it? The man of today is not interested in getting redemption from his sins rather he himself is uncertain about his position as a criminal as compared to the deeds of god.

Since there is no higher or superior authority against which the actions of humans can be evaluated, any judgment on justice or injustice, good or bad has become complex, individual-based and therefore often blurred and misjudged. This is the absurdity of situation of the post-modern world. According to Camus, “…since we have no higher value to direct our action, we shall aim at efficiency. Since nothing is true or false, good or bad, our principle will become that of showing ourselves to be the most effective, in other words the most powerful. And then the world will no longer be divided into the just and unjust, but into masters and slaves” (Camus, *The
Rebel 13). What Camus means by masters and slaves is the relation between dominant and who is dominated. We will again reach at the same absurdity of just and unjust when we analyze the scope and intentions of the relationship of master and slave or dominant and dominated.

According to Camus, however absurd the situation may be, “the very first thing that cannot be denied is the right of others to live” (Camus, The Rebel 15). In this way, any action that limits or influences the right of others to live comfortably in their personal domains will be judged as injustice or oppression. The one who creates these limits directly or indirectly for the other is an oppressor or in Camus’ words falls under the category of masters. The oppression should not strictly be considered in the form of physical torture only. Its forms may vary with respect to the situation and the cultural contexts. For instance, in The Last Flicker, Jagsir is socially, psychologically and economically oppressed. Anything that hinders essential human dignity can be understood as oppression. Injustice therefore becomes an inevitable part of master-slave, oppressor-oppressed relationship. Taking account of Night of the Half Moon, Ghana and Modan, according to the categorization suggested by Camus, are in the relation of master and slave. Modan’s father experiences physical, social and psychological oppression because of the false case planned by Ghana in order to trap him. Physically, he was beaten up by the police in front of his family and of the whole village. His beard was pulled at by a policeman which is one of the metaphors that symbolizes the greatest insult of a man in the Punjabi culture. Socially, he is insulted for having relations with the dacoits and drug smugglers. Psychologically, he is depressed to such an extent that he loses his strength to sustain his existence. He is victimized not by a natural situation but by a malicious person Ghana and thus his oppression is intentional. In this situation Ghana seems to be representing the category of masters while Pala belongs to the slaves.

The next and inevitable step in master/slave or oppressor/oppressed relationship is rebellion. It is the situation when an oppressed being individually decides to negate the direct or indirect dominance and authority of the oppressor. There
comes a point when the oppressed decides ‘I cannot tolerate anymore, not even a bit of it.’ Modan, the son of Pala and the protagonist of *Night of the Half Moon*, seems to be following the similar attitude when he decides to act against Ghana. He was an ordinary farmer who used to help his father in their fields. It was only after the death of his father that the conflict starts between the culturally constructed image of a ‘man’ who lives with self-respect and his own position against it. There comes a point when Modan says ‘no’ to his present position and decides to take revenge for the death of his father. This image of a ‘man,’ which is highlighted by the author in the text and also has been repeatedly pointed out by the different characters in the discourse, belongs to the integral paradigm and is often understood as a typical Punjabi trait.

This earth is inhabited by people who are so mean that they don’t extend the favour of a single coin – and there are those who shower a million favours on everyone around and yet never breathe a word about it…. It’s not money that makes a person big, what one really needs is a generous heart … And the true son of a man should always be magnanimous. What is one to do with the money of someone who is mean and petty – roast corncobs? …. But so long as I live, I’m going to stay right here on top of the mound and play my own flute. When I finally leave, I want people to sit up and say: ‘Well this was a man who was born with a purpose.’ (91)

Being a ‘Man,’ means having a generous heart and the one who gives equivalent in return (generally in the context of injustice done against someone) which is quite similar to the English proverb ‘tit for tat.’ This concept is exemplified by Modan in the novel by avenging the death of his father. He denies his victimized state by resorting to a violent action which his father fails to do. The novel hence presents a contradiction between two different modes of being. Pala, who is victimized by the situation, is sympathized by the people of his own culture, but fails to gain their respect for being pitiful and helpless. According to the cultural context of a ‘Man,’ the path followed by his son Modan, actually should have been followed by him (Pala). People can sympathize with him for his gentle behavior, but they do not applaud the way he dies. People regard the death of Pala as injustice and expect his son Modan to do the same against “Ghanekiyani.” Sheri, Modan’s childhood friend, says:
That’s because they have not yet encountered someone who can pay them back in the same coin. They only have guts to go after people who don’t hit back. But mind what I say, if they think they are so mighty, one day they will meet their match. And when that happens, you wait and see they’ll be torn up by the roots and tossed into the pig-through. (37)

After his father's death, Modan is internally upset, mainly for two reasons. First, the way his father dies is intolerable to him. Second, he is angry with his whole family for accepting the death of Pala passively. In this mentally aggressive state, he starts quarrelling with almost everyone in the family. He squabbles with his mother on being asked where he was going. He even speaks harshly and comments on her childish cribbing as: "So what if it does? If somebody like her cribbing and meaning all the time, let her!" (26). He returns after five days and when his brother Sajjan tries to enquire where he was during these days, Modan rebuffs:

What do you think I have been doing? Roaming about without any purpose? How often have you seen me do that?.... You were not asking.... you were poking your nose into my business - may be you think- 'Modan is secretly buying some property.’
But if I really start doing that you would all sit up and take notice, young fellow! (28-9)

The reason of this kind of awkward behaviour on his part is his psychological upheaval, the inner turmoil which does not let him accept the situation as it is. It can be termed as the sign of unconscious revolt of Modan against injustice he is suffering from.

In order to understand the legitimacy of the murder of Ghana by Modan, the very first thing we need to enquire is Modan’s oppressed state. Or in Camus’ parlance – Does Modan belong to the class of slaves? If the answer is ‘yes’ then what kind of oppression Modan experiences? The answers of these questions have personal and cultural connotations. Firstly, the death of father is a moment of grief for Modan. Injustice is obviously there if the right to live of a person (Pala) is eroded by some other being (Ghana). Sartre says, “My death is not for me but for others; it is not my concern, but the concern of others who will notice it and need to deal with it as an
aspect of their continuing concrete environment (Patka 132).” In this way, the death of Pala is a concern of Modan and he is the one who needs to deal with the situation after him. Secondly, according to the Punjabi culture, he is a coward and not a true son of a ‘man’ if he accepts the death of his father passively because it connotes that he is not able to protect his family. He is considered as an inferior human being and treated as an objectified image like a lampoon by his friends and other villagers. He is socially oppressed in the matter of manhood and self-respect. What is at stake if he does not take any action against his father’s murderer is his anakh.

Anakh, according to the culture of Punjab, can conceptually be summarized as “a higher way of holding oneself” (Fox 2). However, anakh cannot be used as a synonym for heroism for the reason that it is a part of it (heroism), a kind of sub-element. Heroism is a wider term, having universal significance with its larger scope and various types whereas anakh can be defined as a higher level of holding an individual's self-respect and pride in different human situations. The elements that hurt or maintain it have been culturally and socially constructed throughout the ages of a particular community. In the context of Punjabi community, anakh is an essential part of heroism. And to protect or maintain one's anakh, every action taken by an individual, even though it leads to the violation of the rules, is considered legitimate by the people of the community. These actions are normally appreciated unanimously by the people even though sometimes, as in the case of Modan, they are not overtly advocated due to many other reasons like economic dependence on the other party, fear of unpleasant relations with them etc. If we analyze the discourse of Night of the Half Moon deeply, almost similar things can be observed happening from the beginning till the end.

Modan's reasons for killing Ghana are totally different from those of Ghana because he (Ghana) conspiratorially kills Modan's father for economic reasons but Modan Kills Ghana to protect his anakh. The people of the village know this fact and internally appreciate what Modan does but no one except Ruldu comes forward to advocate Modan's righteousness overtly. Those, who criticize the aggressive action of
Modan, criticize it for the economic hardships that Modan would have to face afterwards or they themselves fear of violating friendly relations with Ghanekian because this may further lead to an economic loss for them. Hence Modan, like Jeona, Dulla, Sucha and Mirza, is left alone by the people of his community to fight his fate. Despite unspoken consent of the people of his community, Modan’s rebellion remains personal in nature from the beginning till the end.

The strong inspiration that encourages rebellion lies in the cultural assumptions whereas “mysterious energy” (a term used by Clarissa Pinkola Estes in the Introduction to Joseph Campbell’s book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*), which is necessary to execute it (rebellion), emanates from within a human being. According to Clarissa Pinkola Estes, “…the mysterious energy for inspiration, revelation, and action in heroic stories worldwide is also universally found in human beings” (XXV). Another thing, which needs clarification regarding the “mysterious energy” is that it is not similar to *eros* (the life-instinct) or *thanatos* (the death-instinct), which are closely associated with the innate qualities of living beings as defined by Freud, in the sense that it can largely be altered or affected by the culture and the external experiences of human beings. It is more likely to be a cultural phenomenon in which an individual keeps on altering his ‘self’ according to the mental images collected from various cultural components and the decisions taken by him in different circumstances according to his freedom of choice. Pala lacks this “mysterious energy” while Modan possesses it in abundance, and after getting inspired, though in the form of an irony, from his friends Sheri and Gyala and *taaya* Lallu, it is difficult for him to control himself. He, instead of going to his house, goes to his farm, digs for the pistol, which he had concealed in a small earthen pot under the ground, and kills Ghana who meets him on the way by chance. With this murder, Modan is no longer the same human being as he was earlier. The inner drama of an individual and the outside experiences go side by side, altering, affecting and modifying each other. Within this drama an individual selects his priorities, a specific way of leading one’s present and future stage.

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53 The whole family of Ghana is collectively called *Ghanekian*
When we inspect the deep roots of the question: What inspires Modan, an ordinary farmer, to become aggressive and murderer?, the search for its answer would naturally take us to a vague image of an ideal ‘Man’ of the Punjabi culture which has been shaped by different mythological characters, historical figures, legendary heroes etc. This vague image of an ideal ‘Man’ can metaphorically be replaced by the term ‘hero.’ The traits, or more suitably the tropes, attributed to that image are the traits of heroism. It is not necessary for all the traits to be present in a single unified figure. Instead, it can be drawn from various mythic, legendary and historic figures of different times in different situations. For example in the context of Punjabi culture, fearlessness may be seen to be drawn from Porus; to fight against social injustice and bravery from Dulla Bhatti; vengeance from Jeona Maur; pride from Sucha Surma and Mirza; the feeling of self-immolation from Ranjha and Mahiwal; patriotism, loyalty and devotion from Kartar Singh Srabha, Udham Singh and Bhagat Singh etc. All these figures add something to the connotation of heroism in Punjabi culture and indirectly determine the behaviour of the protagonists generally revealed in the different forms of its literature.

The source of inspiration or the heroic image that reflects in the character of Modan is the image of a legendary hero, Jeona Maur who is known in Punjabi culture for taking his revenge on Dogar. According to the popular version of the legend there lived two jat brothers Jeona and Kishna in the village Maur, situated in the Malwa region of Punjab. Kishna was a dacoit with compassionate heart. He used to loot the rich in order to give it to the poor. In his group Kishna had a fast friend whose name was Dogar. Once Dogar, in the greed for money, deceived Kishna by getting him arrested by the police. Kishana, after having been brutally tortured by the police, was sent to Kala Pani for life imprisonment. Kishna’s brother Jeona was a kind and religious man and a true follower of Naina Devi. Jeona could not bear the deception of Dogar. He himself decided to become a dacoit to avenge the deception. It is believed that he had received a boon from the Devi that if he, after having killed
anyone, managed to reach her (*Devi's*) darbar without looking back, nobody, even police, could harm him. Jeona very bravely killed Dogar but could not manage to reach the *darbar of Naina Devi* (without looking back) and was killed by the police. But before his death, he did many courageous and heroic deeds. He stood against injustice and the wrong doers to protect the rights of the poor. Since then, Jeona has been revered as a great hero of the Punjabi community for his courage, bravery and determination to take revenge without caring for his own life.

Modan undergoes the same mental turbulence over the death of his father which Jeona must have experienced when his brother was deceived. The acute feeling of revenge dominates the psyche of both of these characters. Social morality and ethics cannot stop them for being in action for saving their honour and self-esteem. Modan’s character is the true replica of the mental image of Jeona Maur. When he decides to take revenge for the death of his father, he is in the process, however unconsciously, of assimilating his ‘self’ to the image of a higher order of heroism. Estes too corroborates the notion by saying: “…the heroic self seeks an exalting spiritual countenance, that is, a higher way of holding and conducting oneself.” This desire of “higher way of holding and conducting oneself” in Modan itself speaks for him as a hero- “superior in degree to other men and to [his] environment” (Fox 2).

The heroic images created through the lives and actions of different legendary heroes of Punjab serve as cultural metaphors for the people of the community. These images time and again keep on reflecting in the attitude and behaviour of Modan throughout the discourse. The narrator describes his position in the novel as:

**The earth seemed to tremble under the fury of his pounding feet, sending shivers down the leaves of the trees that stood motionless. And it appeared as if that moment he would be able to repeat the performance of the legendary Bhimsen; hurl elephants up in the air with such ferocity that they would forever keep zooming in the heavens, never ever to land on the earth again. (42)**

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56 The premises of the temple of Hindu Goddess (Naina Devi) where the devotees sing hymns in her praise.
The “mysterious energy” due to which one sets to be in action, as it has been mentioned earlier too, emanates from within. It is an individual’s response to the outside stimuli. Man is what he wants to be, or more specifically, chooses to be. This is the reason why individuals, in spite of sharing same cultural myths, beliefs, motifs, assumptions etc., behave differently in almost similar circumstances. In this way, Sartre is right when he says “existence precedes essence.” In Night of the Half Moon, Modan, Sajan and Chhottu share the same culture and familial atmosphere, but only Modan, out of the three, decides to be in action. Only he is not ready to compromise with the situation, while the other two brothers make alliance with Ghanekiyans for material gains without much difficulty. Thomas Carlyle in his influential book On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History says, “A just man will generally have a better cause than money in what shape so ever, before deciding to revolt...” (249). This better cause, in the case of Modan, is his self-esteem, dignity, manhood or in Punjabi language anakh.

Analyzing the character of Modan in the background of the history of Punjab we, without any hitch, notice that his behaviour and actions are in no way abnormal. Throughout ages, the Punjabi community has been observed eroding moral and ethical boundaries in order to protect and maintain essential human dignity; and society itself has been noticed acknowledging, accepting and appreciating it. Its history has witnessed numerous figures contravening these moral obligations to protect their personal dignity and the honour of their families. For instance, in order to guard the honour of the family, when Sucha, who was in army at that time, came to know about the illicit relationship of his sister-in-law Biro with a family friend Ghukar Mall Chahal, ran off from the army. After having confirmed the matter from his villagers, he went straight to Ghukar, challenged and killed him in the middle of the sath \(^{57}\) of his village. The friends of Ghukar could not dare to oppose Sucha's valour and ferocity and ran away from that spot. After murdering Ghukar, Sucha went to his house and killed his sister-in-law Biro. However, these deaths should be differentiated from the

\(^{57}\) A common meeting-place in the village where usually the elders pass their free time by gossiping or playing cards.
present-day concept of “honour” killing (which more or less depends on many various factors like the economic condition of boy’s family, his caste etc.). Sucha’s acts were inspired from the conceptualization of social justice of his time which was quite different from the present-day social paradigm.

After having killed both Ghukar and Biro, Sucha ran away from his village towards the west of Malwa. There was a woman named Sahib Kaur in the village Gehri near Bathinda. She was a widow and had two sons. Her elder son, Basant was in his early teens. She started hanging with an influential man named Gajjan Vailly. When her son tried to stop her, she got him beaten up with the help of her lover. At that time Sucha was famous in that area for his bravery and helping the poor or needy. When the matter went out of control, the panchayat of the village approached Sucha to solve the problem. He responded quickly and tried his level best to solve the matter. But when he failed to solve the matter peacefully he killed both Gajjan Vailly and Sahib Kaur. Sucha killed many people during his life for the betterment of large number of local people and in the name of justice. He was not only respected for his actions but has also been designated as the hero. The adjective "Soorma" has automatically been attached with his name and people popularly call him by the name "Sucha Soorma."

Analytically speaking, Sucha crossed the boundaries drawn by moral and ethical norms by killing another human. But the cultural particularities of "Punjabiat" do not regard the actions of Sucha unlawful in any way. A peculiar kind of relaxation can be observed, provided by the Punjabi community in the matter concerned with one's Anakh. Any violent action done to protect one's anakh, honour, dignity, to help the poor or needy remains astonishingly outside the boundaries of moral or ethical concerns. In this way the violence and ferocity shown by Sucha, with which he kills Ghukar, the scoundrels like Gajjan and Sahib Kaur, does not let him fall under the category of a criminal rather help him become the hero. This underlying spirit of being

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58 Vailli (derived from vail means drugs) literally means a person who takes drugs. Today it is used to connote a local ruffian of a village.

59 A local administrative committee of a village usually consisting of five elected members.
violent or ferocious to save or guard one's dignity is also shared by Modan and Ruldu in the novel. Modan, whether consciously or unconsciously, shares the common space with the legendary heroes of Punjab where personal dignity is given the primary status by neglecting any economic, moral, social or religious obligations.

The phenomenal homogeneity shared by the legendary heroes and Modan is based on the importance they give to their lives lived with dignity and pride. Their personal dignity becomes the central point of their existence. Any social barrier, whether it is social morality or religious ethics based on *pap-pun*60, fails to restrain them from committing violent acts. The dream of living prosperous domestic life is often been sacrificed by these heroes in order to achieve and maintain what as a cultural metaphor can be called *anakh*. Economic values are far more secondary and do not stand anywhere in the life of Modan or in the life of any other legendary hero of Punjab.

In his struggle against injustice Modan is not alone but throughout the novel, he is accompanied by his loyal friend Ruldu. Ruldu proves to be the only one character who understands what is going on in his friend's unconscious. Moreover, he justifies Modan's violent action against Ghanekiyan to the villagers sitting in the *sath*. Akin to his friend’s ideas, he too acknowledges the notion that it is only one's self-esteem and honour which makes a being ‘Man’ in the real sense of the word. Arguing with Mirab he says:

> True son of his mother he has proved himself to be …. People are only good at making claims about their personal courage… but not many would dare to do what he has done…. Man makes property; but that property can't bring back a dead man. You are born only once. So what's the point in becoming a *lakhpati* if one can't even guard one's sense of honour…. money even the prostitutes have. (49-50)

He fearlessly advocates his friend’s actions by making other people aware of the difference between living an honourable life and living a prosperous life without

60 The Hindu concept according to which the person who commits *pap* goes to *narak* (hell) and who does *pun* (charity) goes to *swarg* (heaven).
any self-respect or personal dignity. In a metaphorical way, he selects the profession of prostitution to indicate a particular class for whom money is the pivotal point of their existence and for it, they can even sacrifice their honour and personal dignity. In prostitution, self, in the form of body, is sold like a commodity and along with it, personal dignity and honour too are sacrificed. Ruldu regards all professions equal to prostitution which give primary importance to making money than to guard their personal dignity and pride. He further says:

Let all such people go to hell. No one begs or borrows, nor does anyone give…. Besides why sell your integrity to scrape a living? When integrity is lost, self-respect and honour are lost. Can property help retrieve it? Under these circumstances what do you do with the property? Lick it up? (50)

Quite like an archetypal confidant of the protagonist, Ruldu stands by Modan in every difficult situation. His ways of standing with him are also rebellious. He fearlessly defends his friend’s actions to the different villagers. His concern for Modan's life is much more genuine than that of Sheri and Gyala who only prove to be opportunistic when there comes a time to stand with his friend.

While narrating the story the author has proved to be a successful hetrodiegetic narrator with the ability to peep down at the deeper level of different human relationships. The whole situation, even the discourse itself, seems full of contradictions and turns out to be ironical when we observe brothers playing the role of enemies and friends occupying the space vacated by the brothers; father fighting for the rights of someone else's sons (the way Sauna fights for the sons of Ghana's grand uncle); the sons compensating the death of one's father with material benefits (Ghana's sons regard the death of their father as a good opportunity to grab the lands of Pala's sons); husband negating his own wife and brothers in favour of his friend's wife and in the greed of making more money (Sajjan’s relations with the wife of one of Ghana’s sons). This metamorphic form of relations deconstructs the traditional familial system under the effect of accumulative economic problems. All the characters are being flown away by the time towards economically domineering self-effacing system. Only Modan and Ruldu have the courage and will power to rebel against this flow. Though
they cannot overturn or stop the flow of the time, yet their power of resistance marks its presence in the discourse very emphatically. Both of them fail to understand the social nexus based on economic preferences because they consider justice and integrity as the fundamental basis of one's being.

Chhottu, who verbally shows affection towards Modan and his ideology, is unable to take any concrete action against Sajjan. He lacks the inner will power like Modan, which is necessary to mark one's resistance. He is interested in finding out the solution of the problems without being in action at all and that’s why his feelings and intentions do not carry any importance to anyone in the discourse. He narrates Modan the inside story as:

...they have laid a trap for Sajjan. Now what should I say – it isn’t even worth narrating – What do you think makes Sajjan sneaks off to Ghana's younger son Karnail's house every other day? That Kaila, he too is a bastard! – And the one he's brought home, they say, is the daughter of a Muslim woman – someone who had been a keep of a Jat from the pre-partition days in Pakistan – shameless creatures – all of them! (124)

Chhottu acts like a weepy middle-man. He neither has the strength to oppose Sajjan (with whom he is not happy) nor has he the courage to stand with Modan (whose actions he appreciates). When Ghana's elder son stops Chhottu's way and warns him while he was taking the cart across his unplanted field, he comes weeping to complain to Modan like a child:

But the solution that formed inside Modan's fevered mind was certainly a sinister one, as disastrous as the blind fury of the hurricane. Sweeping through the realm of his thoughts, it had violently shaken up the whole vegetation of thoughts, the trees trembled to their very roots and made the leaves fall off and flutter away. (124-25)

Modan, reacting true to his temperament, goes to challenge the sons of Ghana and in the scuffle, gets a fatal wound on his leg by his own brother Sajjan who was at the side of his enemies. Modan fails to retrieve from that wound and dies afterwards. He fights with Ghana's sons to save the integrity of his being and self-respect of his brother Chhottu who himself is not capable of it. And even after his death, the feeling
of revenge does not hit the conscience of Chhottu the way it hits the conscience of Ruldu. "And the very next moment, he sprang to his feet with the suddenness of a forest fire. Grinding his teeth, he screamed, "O Paapiya! How could you leave, setting the forest and postures on fire? Henh? – Tell me, how could you? – Henh? –" (159).

Modan thus fights against injustice that begins after the death of his father and ends with his own death. This fight changes him from an ordinary peasant to a murderer. During this journey from a common man to murderer, despite the friendship of Ruldu, Modan suffers the agony of being desolate and lonely. He gets the company of Dani for a moment but the path he has already chosen for himself does not allow him to cherish the idea of a happy domestic life for long. This path is the path of rebellion. Now the question arises, “the question which constitutes the real progress achieved by Dostoyevsky in the history of rebellion, can one live in a permanent state of rebellion?” (Camus, *The Rebel* 53). Ivan Karamazov suggests the answer to this question as: “one can only live in a permanent state of rebellion by pursuing it to the bitter end” (Camus, *The Rebel* 53). Modan lives in this permanent state of rebellion after he commits murder of Ghana and takes it to the bitter end i.e. to his own death.

**Modan’s Rebellion and the Legitimacy of Murder**

Camus says, “What is a rebel? A man who says no: but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation” (Camus, *The Rebel* 19). He further says that “Rebellion cannot exist without the feeling that somewhere, in some way, you are justified” (19). It is only because of this feeling that an individual prepares himself to fight against injustice. He submits himself completely to a value system which is inspired by integrity and equality. This situation leads him to adopt an attitude of “All or Nothing.” It means he demands the total destruction of the oppression and, if it is not possible, he is ready for self-effacement. He denies any kind of compromise with the situation and his whole being comes into play to resist his oppressed state. His ‘no’ becomes a refusal not only to his own oppression but metaphysically to the oppression of the whole of the universe. In other words, oppression as a concept is denied and it is not
taken as a particular incident. “He proceeds to put self-respect above everything else and proclaims that it is preferable to life itself” (20) and this attitude leads one to take the extreme steps i.e. to kill or to be killed. To kill or to be killed both lead to a murder.

In the beginning of the discussion of the previous part, we stated that however complex the concept of justice may be, it would be injustice if one erodes the right of others to live. Do we not philosophically seem to have been caught in a self-contradictory situation by declaring Modan as a hero (because he does exactly the same thing by murdering Ghana)? In order to resolve this problem, we need to speculate into the cultural connotations of a hero and to that part of Albert Camus’ philosophy where he distinguishes a rebel from a murderer or the one who commits suicide. According to Camus, there is no difference between a murder and suicide.

In the age of negation, it was of some avail to examine one’s position concerning suicide… God is a cheat; the whole world (including myself) is a cheat; therefore I choose to die: suicide was the question then. But ideology, a contemporary phenomenon, limits itself to repudiating other people; they alone are the cheats. This leads to murder. … The final conclusion of the absurdist process is, in fact, the rejection of suicide and persistence in that hopeless encounter between human questioning and the silence of the universe. Suicide would mean the end of this encounter, and the absurdist position realizes it could not endorse suicide without abolishing its own foundations…. But it is plain that absurdist reasoning thereby recognizes human life as the single necessary good, because it makes possible that confrontation, and because without life the absurdist wager could not go on. To say that life is absurd, one must be alive…. The moment life is recognized as a necessary good, it becomes so for all men. One cannot find logical consistency in murder, if one denies it in suicide…. Absolute negation is therefore not achieved by suicide. It can be achieved only by absolute destruction, of both oneself and everybody else. Or it can be experienced only by striving toward that delectable end. Suicide and murder are thus two aspects of a single system, the system of an unhappy intellect which rather that suffer limitation chooses the dark victory which annihilates earth and heaven. (Camus, The Rebel 12-15)

In this way, both murder and suicide are not fit to be called legitimate from the point of view of an absurdist. We cannot say the death of a human being is permissible on one side and impermissible on the other.
But the argument does not end here because this mode of thinking yields another contradiction where the problem of murder is concerned. “The sense of the absurd, when one first undertakes to deduce a rule of action from it, makes murder seem a matter of indifference, hence, permissible. If one believes in nothing, if nothing makes sense, if we can assert no value whatsoever, everything is permissible and nothing is important. There is no pro or con; the murder is neither right nor wrong” (Camus, *The Rebel* 13).

To negate one’s self or the world itself can never be the solution to avert, or at least reduce, human sufferings. Then there must be something to defend essential living environment for human beings. Since the world is divided into masters and slaves, Camus finds rebellion the only possible way to create that living environment. And moreover “all is permissible” if it is done in the form of rebellion rather than in the form of resentment (Modan differs from Ghana in this respect) because a rebel does not only fight for himself but for the whole humanity in general. He is the one who rejects the idea of oppression or injustice from its very roots. He does not kill a person in particular but a small part of oppression spread over the whole world. His act becomes an answer to the oppression of the universe.

For Camus, “rebellion arises from the spectacle of the irrational coupled with an unjust and incomprehensible condition. But its blind impetus clamours for order in the midst of chaos, and for unity in the very heart of the ephemeral. It protests, it demands, it insists that the outrage come to an end…. Its aim is to transform. But to transform is to act, and to act, nowadays, is to kill while it still does not know if murder is legitimate. Hence it is absolutely necessary that rebellion drive its justifications from itself, since it has nothing else to drive them from” (Camus, *The Rebel* 16).

If “to act, nowadays, is to kill,” is Modan, after killing Ghana, a part of rebellion or he does this in the feeling of resentment only – is the question. There is a
difference between an act of rebellion and an act of resentment. Rebellion is more than an act of revenge while resentment is like “an auto-intoxication – the evil secretion, in a sealed vessel, of prolonged impotence…. Resentment is always highly flavored with envy. But we envy what we do not possess while the rebel defends what he has” (Camus, *The Rebel* 23). When we speculate Modan’s character in the light of these factors, we easily confer that he is in no way affected by “the evil secretion.” He does all this in order to end the oppression he is suffering from. He does not accept the situation like his brothers do, he, instead, rebels against it.

Empirically analyzing the situation, we find out that at a certain point both Modan and Ghana are at the same level. Ghana indirectly kills Pala, Modan's father whereas Modan directly murders Ghana. Technically speaking both are murderers. However, at conceptual level, there is a big difference between the actions of these two characters. The difference lies in the purpose of the action and not in the result of it. What Ghana does is entirely different, and in a way, opposite from the actions of Modan. In Ghana's actions, there is a formation of conspiracy, a feeling of malice, “an auto-intoxication, the evil secretion” (23) —which neither was nor can be a part of heroism at any level. He not only kills Pala, but hurts the ego of the whole family. In spite of direct confrontation, he gets Pala beaten up by the Police in front of the whole village. “Stepping forward, he (the sub-Inspector) pulled at Pala's beard as hard as he could, before raining down a hail of *lathi* (baton used by Police) blows on his bare back" (41). The root cause of Ghana’s revenge on Pala is the material loss which his father had because of Pala's *Taaya* Sauna's judicious interference.

Ghana is a murderer of lower level because in his actions there is only treachery, conspiracy and greed of wealth rather than bravery, courage and justice. His action is inspired from and the result of a feeling of resentment which he has been having for a long time against the family of Pala. Any murder committed in the feeling of resentment is not permissible at any cost because it degrades humanity by proving harmful for the congenial living atmosphere for human beings. Moreover, it spreads and acknowledges the concept of oppression and thus adds something to the human sufferings in general, and to Pala’s family, in particular. Even if Ghana is the only
person responsible for the death of Pala, yet he is not a criminal as far as the rules of penal code are concerned. The situation ironically explores the handicapped nature of our judicial system which, in this context, proves to be "blind" in both literal and derivative sense of the word.

Modan, on the other hand, though also a murderer, stands in contrast to Ghana’s foul methods. He, according to the rules of penal code, is a criminal but, according to the cultural context, proves to be superior to those whom law considers innocent or righteous (Ghana). It is a noticeable and peculiar thing that a person is largely appreciated by the community for his actions and for the same actions he is punished and designated as criminal by the law of the same state. It does not imply in any way that criminals are always appreciated by the Punjabi community but there are certain traits outside the circle of law which have connections with the higher or superior way of holding oneself. This higher or superior way of holding oneself has direct relations with the feeling of protest and resistance. It demands, it insists that the outrage and injustice should come to an end. Human suffering then is not seen as belonging to a particular person but it becomes “a collective experience – as the experience of everyone” who suffers. When an individual decides to protest, he assumes a value which has a greater importance than his own life. “He chooses what is preferable to what is not. Not every value leads to rebellion, but every rebellion tacitly invokes a value” (Camus, The Rebel 20). Modan, in the same way, values resistance, dignity and integrity more than the comforts of the world. He takes pain and is ready to bear the burden of loneliness for the sake of this integrity which has been presented in the discourse in various situations by the author.

The irony of the discourse lies in the fact that Modan’s own family members fail to understand this spirit of rebellion and the value system attached with it. They themselves consider Modan a criminal. At one occasion, Modan asks Sajjan to divide the land and give him his share. In the beginning, Sajjan protests but after observing the aggressive temperament of Modan he agrees because "he felt a nameless fear when he looked into Modan's angry eyes – to him, they were the eyes of a murderer" (79). The appearance of his brother's eyes as a murderer's eyes certainly makes him a
stranger for Modan. In spite of feeling proud of his brother's actions, he thinks him a murderer while people, who had created murderous circumstances for his own father, appear to him his benefactors. He actually fails to understand the conceptual reasons and metaphorical links behind his brother's struggle against injustice in the greed of economic benefits. He even misses to see the cultural contours of the heroic path which his own brother is following.

In the novel, parallel to the story of Modan and Ghanekiyan, there runs an unending dialogue and interminable tension in the discourse among two different, and seemingly opposite, groups. The major difference between these groups is based on their value systems. In one group there are people who take into consideration pride and dignity as the most valuable thing of their existence whereas, on the second one, there are others who are mindful of collecting money as the most important aspect of their lives. The first group, which is comparatively smaller, consists of Modan and his friend Ruldu. The second group includes Ghana and his sons, Modan's bother Sajjan, Mirab, Namha and many other villagers. There is also a third group of people in the novel, who do not have their own ideology and they are just there to watch the street show. This group has been described in the narration as:

...people in this village are always waiting to hear ‘a bang or a crash’ — of some untoward incident, a murder or an arrest. Without it, your gossip mill simply won't run. What else can one expect of you? You are always around to watch the fun when someone else is being destroyed. With you it's always this: who's next in the firing line? (61-62)

The role of this ideologically inert group is to conform to the action of the powerful and that too is, for most of the time, to pass time only. Gyala and Sheri, and up to some extent Taaya Lallu himself fall into this group.

The dialogic relations with and within these groups go hand-in-hand with the change in the situations. Modan’s brother Sajjan immediately recognizes the buttered side of the bread and stands with his enemies leaving his brother to fight alone. The new relations are born with the metamorphosing economic equations within theses
groups. Chhottu, even if he desires at various places in the discourse, finds himself unable to break the chains of economic impositions. It is only Modan who stands outside of this economically dominated equation with his extra-ordinary courage and bravery.

Grudial Singh's artistic narrative technique is once again evident when we see Ruldu arguing with the villagers defending the action of his friend Modan. He confirms the value system adopted by Modan that there is something more important than the material values. Ruldu seems to be interpreting Modan's unconscious mind which he (Modan) himself does not directly expose in the discourse. Through Ruldu’s fearless and adamant expressions, Modan seems to be laying bare the causes behind his actions whose roots are deeply entrenched in the culture of Punjab and in the lives of its legendary heroes. Ruldu acts as his friend’s spokesperson at many places in the discourse:

Now you tell me, what’s wrong with avenging yourself? After all, that’s man’s right. What is so special about it…henh? (49)

The irony of the novel resides in the fact that Ruldu occupies the space vacated by Modan’s own brothers. He not only supports the actions taken by Modan against Ghana but himself is determined to stand against the tyrants. Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* says:

The tyrants of human breed, usurping to themselves the goods of their neighbours, arise and the cause of widespread misery… The elementary deeds of the hero are those of the clearing of the field. (202)

The “Clearing of the field” here connotes standing against the tyrants or wrong-doers in order to release people from “widespread misery,” or in Marat’s words, “…I want to cut off a few heads to save a great number” (qtd. in Camus, *The Rebel* 96). Except Modan, Ruldu is the only character in the novel who has the spirit of resistance against social and moral justice.
Modan’s cause for being in action is personal, but the cause of everything Ruldu does or is ready to do is somewhat impersonal. He, corroborating the execution of “mysterious energy,” epitomizes selfless friendship with Modan when he straightens the boundary between the fields of Modan and Ghanekian and challenges Ghuddu to stop him; mortgages his land to arrange a wife for Modan; challenges, abuses and attacks Sajjan and the sons of Ghana during the scuffle; and at the end of the novel, anticipates his future plans as: “How could you leave, setting the forests and pastures on fire?” (159)

Both these characters i.e. Modan and Ruldu share some common space with each other and thus their propensities in the matter of value system are more or less similar. Both value resistance instead of accepting the situation passively. They keep on leading their lives free from any kind of fear about their future and remorse for their past. Death does not frighten them the way it does for the other characters in the novel. Ruldu says at one place:

The thing is – does anyone have the guts, the manliness to actually come up and say these things to my face? Let him try, and see if I don’t tear him to pieces! Yah! … This is a living man, this Ruldu, not some timid creature you can tie to a post! I can destroy even the best of them … yah! Let them try and touch the tiger’s tail. [Let him come, whose death is waiting! I’m just careless about my death like a wanderer. What harm can anyone does to me?] (109)

Campbell also shares the same views about the concept of death in the lives of heroes by saying, “The hero would be no hero if death held for him any terror. The first condition is reconciliation with the grave” (Campbell 329).

Quite opposite to Ruldu and Modan, there is the second group of people in the village who think both of them as fools for their meaningless actions. This group also includes Modan's own brothers along with Ghana and his family, Mirab, Namha and many other villagers. According to this group any violent action taken by anyone leads him to "the rigmarole of brawls and legal battles. Once it starts, almost every member of that household gets caught in the net of corruption that clerks, lawyers and
policemen spread so adroitly... what is the result? Nothing, except that you find
yourself back where you were, poorer, penniless and landless!” (50-51). Their
approach to life is of a typical businessman who only knows: how to evaluate things
and life in terms of profit and loss. They tend to accept life as it is as long as it does
not lead to any economic loss. In The Rebel, Camus categorizes these types of people
as “pleasure-seekers” and calls them “counter-revolutionaries” (97).

The conceptual difference between the two opposite value systems is explored
when we observe that the sons of Ghana take the murder of their father as an
opportunity for their economic growth. They are ready to compensate the death of
their father with the land of Modan's family. Gheecher, one of the villagers, explains
the conspiratorial plans of the sons of Ghana as:

Their real intention was to get all the three sons into trouble, so that they could tempt
or threaten the old woman and grab their land. They would have managed it all by
paying their way to the revenue officers. And if they had succeeded, they wouldn't
have cared a fig about the consequences. They are just the kind to fleece anybody, in
the name of their dead father.... These people sent for Har Kaur's brothers and signed
a secret agreement with them. Now during the next redemarcation, they will stake a
claim on half the land. As a result, their share will go up by another four acres. (63-
64)

The dialogic relationship and the tension between these two value systems
remain consistent till the end of the discourse. On the one hand, there are Modan and
Ruldu who never give up and continue fighting for their integrity and justice and on
the other, there are economically well-established business minded people that never
leaves an opportunity to make profit even at the cost of their self-esteem. In spite of
their economical inferior position, the discourse is dominated by the conscience of
Modan and Ruldu and they remain consistent in their behaviour from the beginning till
the end of the novel.

The people, whom Camus calls counter-revolutionaries, are unable to hold any
strong opinion against what Modan has done yet they find it hard to come and stand
with Modan to advocate his violent action. The whole situation suggests a conceptual
opposition (Gill, *Structures of Narrative* 39) in the sense that Modan's great grand Uncle Taaya Sauna once acted violently against Togha who was shouting abominations outside his (Sauna’s) house and in the scuffle broke his leg. A case was filed against Sauna, but the whole village stood in support of him (Sauna) because he was a just man, and the court cleared him to be acquitted. But in the case of Modan, no one, even if many people share his ideological position, turns up in the court for his support. The people of the village know this clearly that the other two brothers of Modan i.e. Sajjan and Chhottu were not involved in the murder of Ghana yet they do not come forward in the court to reveal the truth. A drastic change in the attitude and behaviour of the people has been explored by the author. The people, who were ever ready to do anything to reveal the truth, are now lagging behind hiding their faces to confront the truth and to say anything against Ghana's family. If we enquire the reason of this drastic change in the attitude and behaviour of the people, we would easily be able to locate them in the transforming economic scenario of the society. Old agricultural tools and ways have been replaced by new technological developments. Muscle strength and hard physical work are no longer the inevitable part of agriculture profession. Instead, new technological developments in the form of tractors, combines, tubewells etc. have created a ground for new type of social and professional relations which are dominated by the economic factors. The old concepts like mutual sharing, trust, dignity etc. have slipped to the secondary position under the shadow of economically dominated social relations. The problem with Modan and Ruldu is that they still show affinity to the old value system and therefore find themselves unfit in the transforming economic scenario of the society.

At the time of Sauna, the people of the community were not dominated or fascinated by the material benefits as they are in the time of Modan. At the time of Sauna, people considered it their prime duty to stand for justice and truth perceived through cultural contours without caring for their relationship with the wrong-doers and the material interest associated with them. The whole situation directly explores how the fundamental elements of social and cultural systems have undergone a drastic change with the tightening grasp of domineering economic dependence. Modan's temperament here is completely different from the people with whom he shares time
and space in his existential situation. According to him, earning one's livelihood alone is not the soul purpose of the human existence and on its basis differentiates between humans beings from animals.

It's not a matter of livelihood alone – as far as that goes, even cats and dogs know how to scrounge for a meal. Tell me, how else is a man different from other lowly animals?

(83)

Modan's unhappiness with his youngest brother Chhottu is based on the fact that he does not have the spirit of resistance. Chhottu is not happy with Sajjan because he clearly knows what Sajjan is doing is wrong but he does not have the courage to oppose him. Modan wants him to be a courageous man so that he can protest wherever he recognizes "Sajjan's obvious bids to heap indignities upon him" (81). Sometimes he feels irritated by Chhottu's "total refusal to protest" (81).

Modan, who himself has spent fourteen years in jail for standing against injustice, demands from his brother to adopt the same attitude. Chhottu, even if he acknowledges Modan's violent actions, falls flat to share the common heroic space and attitude with him. On one occasion, Modan warns him by saying:

"Oye Chhottu, I never thought you would join hands with our enemies. Now since you have, I can't say anything much – but let me tell you this – you'll regret it one day…..

(80)

Modan's relationship with his arranged wife Dani and his step-son Gelu explores another aspect of leading his heroic life. After committing murder of Ghana, he has been shown as a rough, strong and sturdy man who does not compromise with his circumstances, instead, stands against them with his inner-will power and amazing potential. The way he accepts his step-son Gelu and tries his level best to provide comfortable atmosphere to Dani reveal his another humanistic aspect which is genuine and true to his being. This type of human concern can also be noticed in the personal lives of the legendary heroes of Punjab and their concern for the poor and needy. This aspect of his being exhibits the beautiful world created both in his imagination (in
which he portrays earth in the form of a woman) and reality. This personal world is like a utopian microcosm of an ideal life where nobody attacks the essential human dignity of the other to satisfy one's personal desires. Modan is aggressive, stubborn and sturdy to those whom he considers wrong in various manners but in his personal world he is a lovable, docile and a thorough gentleman. This human concern of Modan makes him an adorable character who not only knows how to rebel against injustice but also knows how to construct and protect genuine human values and concern for each other.

Committing the murder of Ghana does not prove Modan to be an ill-natured being rather makes him a hero who individually decides to take arms against metaphysical oppression of the universe. If he would have silently accepted the death of his father by not reacting against it, it would have meant that he has recognized the legitimacy of unlawful murder and hence the idea of the legitimacy of oppression spread in the world. If one accepts injustice, he silently gives approval to its practice and therefore becomes part of it. “The rebel, on principle, persistently refuses to be humiliated without asking the others should be…. Rebellion, though apparently negative since it creates nothing, is profoundly positive in that it reveals the part of man which must always be defended” (Camus, *The Rebel* 24-25).

**Modan and his Existential Situation**

Apart from the resemblance of Modan’s actions with those of the legendary heroes of Punjab, he proves to be an existential hero when we analyze his actions in the given problematic circumstances. He himself, behaving like an ordinary peasant, may not have been aware of the philosophical interpretations or the fundamental arguments which existentialism can make about his actions or choosing his course of life. However the path he chooses to lead his life constructs an image of a real existential hero. He acts like Prometheus of his own age with the slogan: “O my soul, do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible” (Pindar, qtd. in Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 3).
As long as existentialism believes that all men are mortal and every being, whether fortunately or unfortunately, has the knowledge of it, it would keep on proffering different manners which would lead him from being to becoming. The pre-hand knowledge of one’s own death does not direct an individual’s actions towards the darkness of nihilism – for which existentialism had long been accused – instead, it (existentialism) provides a special space to an individual to “exhaust the limits of the possible” while one is consciously leading one’s course of life.

It was mainly Sartre who dragged existentialism out of the darkness of nihilism and made it companionable with humanism in his remarkable book *Existentialism and Human Emotions*. Since then, existentialism has been enjoying its privileged position in the fictional and real world of Modern and Post-modern era in one way or the other. According to Sartre, almost every situation, as long as it affects or gets affected by human actions, is existential in the form of subject/object relationship. Human self, even if it acknowledges God/soul as a part of essence, can not get itself free from its inbuilt subject/object relationship. It is similar to the concept of duality of dialogism, which we may or may not acknowledge but cannot negate; because it is forced upon us due to our consciousness about our own self. Therefore, at some points existentialism overlaps the boundaries of humanism and the other way round.

The essence of an individual, in existentialism, finds its way through existence or in other words originates through the conscience of the individual. As a result, it contradicts the traditional idea of essence in which it was regarded as a part of nature – a pre-determined behaviour of human beings based on their general characteristics. It cannot be passed from one individual to another because it is unique in many various ways. The only element that differentiates each being from the other is his conscience or the decisions taken by him according to his consciousness. The being that consciously chooses to “exhaust the limits of the possible” turns out to be the hero or the superior being as compared to others.

The protagonist of the novel Modan is such a being whose ways of leading his life and methods of solving the existential knots of his life are different from all other
characters in the novel. The mode of being he chooses for himself echoes a typical image of a ‘superior being’ who as a cultural and social metaphor can be compared with the legendary heroes of the Punjabi community. The actions taken by him reverberate and share the ideological background of the actions of these heroes. The behavioural similarity that he shares with Jeona Maur (Jeona avenges Dogar for deceiving his brother) for avenging his father’s death does not limit the scope of his heroism to the literary text (*Night of the Half Moon*) only but also helps him to emerge as a cultural metaphor of an image of ideal man of the Punjabi community. The actions of the legendary heroes of Punjab recur in the novel when Modan takes various steps to protect his subjectivity and the central position. In his behaviour, there is a peculiar kind of resistance which makes his existence more meaningful than those who believe in accepting the situation as it is offered to them by the circumstances.

In the beginning of the novel, Modan has been shown returning from the jail after completing the tenure of his imprisonment. He feels strange and lonely when he buys his ticket from the railway clerk, boards the train, and even when he sits in the carriage. He deliberately chooses a longer way to his home. It has been fourteen years since Modan has left his village and a lot of changes have occurred in its form. Old mud-houses have been replaced with brick houses, some new areas have been brought under cultivation and the saplings have now grown to become trees. Among all these changes, Modan feels himself alienated, desolate and lonely. His blunt behaviour with the co-traveler reflects the revival of the sub-conscious agony which has not been subdued during the years he has spent in the prison. He is trying to make a conceptual link between his past (life before going to the jail) and the present when a co-traveler interrupts him and Modan answers him with astonishing curtness. The night appears to him darker than ever before. The narrator deliberately uses these metaphors to describe the agony and loneliness of Modan.

It does not seem to him the same village that he used to feel about it fourteen years ago. It no longer matches with the image about which Modan has kept imagining for so many years. This new form of the village creates an effect of alienation in his consciousness and he finds himself unable to link his past with the present. His
conscience is dominated by a particular kind of loneliness which is more acute than that time when he was in prison. The narrator describes this ironical situation as:

He was aware that he had changed, and this conviction had grown sharper from the moment he had stepped out of the gates of the jail.... In fact, he had a growing feeling that he had become incapable of speech.... His present state of mind seemed somewhat strange to him. That a man should be returning with such feeling of sadness and alienation! In the past, whenever he turned homewards, he would be in such a tearing hurry that he would goad the oxen forward, racing them up and down the incline of the track, unmindful of anything else. (1-4)

Modan cannot acknowledge the situation favourable because the new world exists beyond the image created in his consciousness. The difference between his earlier life and the present one is shown by the symbols of light and darkness. It seems to him, at least on metaphysical level, that darkness is spread all over the world. The behaviour of the members of his own family intensifies these clouds of darkness and he does not feel happy being among them. Both his brothers and their families show no interest in his homecoming and Sajjan even makes excuses for not reaching to receive him (Modan) on the railway station. Modan is unable to tolerate to be objectified by the situation (the dominance of his brothers) and for this reason, he finally decides to create his own space, the world where he wants to remain as the master.

Modan creates this world of his own on a mound which is situated outside his village. He decides to repair his old house and takes his mother along with him to live there. His conscience does not allow him to be dominated and objectified by his brothers. He asserts his subjectivity by freely choosing to leave the house of his brothers, though he has an equal share in that house (which is in the village) too, and consequently turns out to be the decision maker in the situation.

After the death of his father, the responsibility of the household fell on the shoulders of Modan. But as an existential being, his consciousness denied to accept the situation as it was being offered to him. He resisted against the whole surrounding system that was determined to treat him as an object among other objects —a
sympathetic victim of the situation as his father was. He decided to stand against the
dominant forces by asserting his full authority and killed Ghana.

From the viewpoint of existentialism, the whole situation suggests a
*conceptual opposition* in the attitudes of father and son. Pala, the father of Modan, is
caught in “looked at” position from where he thinks himself as the real culprit of the
situation. His self is dominated by a false consciousness i.e. what the people would
think of him? He actually is unable to get himself free from the gaze of the others and
as a result victimized by the circumstances. He is being objectified by the situation and
he himself submits his existence to it. According to Sartrian philosophy, Pala enters the
state of *being-for-others* and hence is prone to be objectified by any other conscious
being. In the totalization of the situation, he fails to understand his subjective position
while being over-conscious about his position from the points of view of others. He
utterly fails to understand the importance of the architeconics of his struggle which at
that point was necessary to sustain his existence.

When Modan goes to meet *Taaya* Lallu and his childhood friends Sheri and
Gyala, the atmosphere then turns out to be “a site for the dialogic interaction of
multiple voices, or modes of discourse, each of which is not merely a verbal but social
phenomenon, and as such is the product of manifold determinants that are specific to a
class, social group, and speech community. A person’s speech, composed of languages
from diverse social contexts, does not express a ready-made and autonomous
individuality; instead, his or her character emerges in the course of the dialogue and is
composed of languages from diverse social contexts” (Abrams 62-63). Thus the
utterances of Lallu, Sheri and Gyala, apart from being the result of autonomous
individualities, are based on different social contexts. They all are trying to perceive
the situation of Modan from different points of view. Discussing dialogism, Michael
Holquist argues that at a very basic level, “dialogism is the name not just for a dualism,
but for a necessary multiplicity in human perception. This multiplicity manifests itself
as a series of distinction between categories appropriate to the perceiver on the one
hand and categories appropriate whatever is being perceived on the other” (Holquist
22). The existential categories that are appropriate to Lallu, Sheri and Gyala according
to their own time and space are different from the existential situation of Modan because “for the perceivers, their own time is forever open and unfinished; their own space is always the center of perception, the point around which things arrange themselves as a horizon whose meaning is determined by whenever they have their place in it. By contrast, the time in which we model others is perceived as closed and finished. Moreover, the space in which others are seen is never a significance-charged surrounding, but a neutral environment, i.e. the homogenizing context of the rest of the world. From the perspective of a self, the other is simply in the world, along with everyone and everything else” (Holquist 22).

From the perspective of Modan or the self, the other is simply in the world that is surrounding him at a particular time and space. He resists for acknowledging his position as other in the perception of Lallu and his friends Sheri and Gyala. It becomes intolerable to him to bear the tension of his perceived self and the knowledge of being treated as other through the perception of his friends. For them, the event (Bakhtin defines existence as an event) or environment is neutral, “the homogenizing context of the rest of the world.” But for Modan, the surrounding and the discourse are significance-charged. He is being looked at as an “other” when his friends try to impose their perception on him by making him realize that he is behaving like a coward and this is unacceptable to him (Modan). He leaves the space in anger to avoid the tension aroused by the multiplicity of perceptions and in order to avoid his objectified state as an other by the situation. The decision to be in action resolves the tension between the self and the other and confirms his existence as an event of being.

Modan, behaving quite opposite to his father, asserts his subjectivity by reacting confidently and forcefully instead of accepting the situation passively. The similar kind of resistance can be noticed in the lives and actions of the legendary heroes of Punjab like Dulla Bhatti, Jeona Maur, Sucha Soorma and Mirza. The subjectivity they assert over their enemies is of rare quality and it helps them to become the masters of every adverse situation. For example the phenomenal dominance that Jeona asserts over Dogar is the result of his being in “looking” position whereas Dogar is treated as an object of his gaze, pushing him into “looked at”
position. Apart from this, many other examples and situations can be quoted from the lives of these heroes where they surprisingly turn out to be the controllers of very adverse and complex situations with their determination and free will.

Never ever in the novel Modan leaves the control of the situation as a master. His subjective position remains unchallenged from the beginning to the end of the discourse. His “looking” position and his incisive gaze keep on piercing the others in this way:

...he would stare so hard that his eyes would seem to penetrate beyond the exterior, into far-off courtyards, inner rooms and even distant corners of rooftops. So much so that the onlookers would begin to feel uneasy, thinking that their wives were being ogled.

It does not matter to Modan to whom he is talking. His method and zeal to tackle every situation is very straightforward and according to the traits of the legendary heroes of Punjab. Towards the end of the novel, When Modan is struggling between life and death, Sajjan comes to enquire about his health. The situation is critically tense and a site of silent struggle between two entirely different ideologies or in other words, modes of being. Sajjan peevishly apologizes and Modan replies, “I forgive you but remember what you did was not right…!” (154). Even on his deathbed, Modan does not let himself fall under the category of being-for-others. It is important to note why Modan asserts his subjectivity over his brother. Even if Sajjan is the real brother of Modan, but in the novel, he represents the establishment. He is not able to face the gaze of Modan when he has been made to realized his mistake. Modan’s strong subjectivity pushes him to the “looked at” position whereas he himself is dominating the situation as a controller. In his extremely overriding space, Sajjan’s identity has been reduced to zero.

For a long time, Sajjan sat there, his head bent low, wiping tears from his eyes. Then he got up and went over to Bebe. He had not been able to speak his mind, nor had he been able to face Modan even once. (154)
The space created by him outside the village is not only a physical space but works more like a metaphysical hole. In other words, the space he creates for himself works on two levels simultaneously i.e. physical as well as metaphysical. The later one is based on his concepts about living one’s life as the controller of different existential situations. Any other being who enters his space looses his subjectivity and becomes an object to be affected by his gaze.

To leave the house in the village in favour of the house outside the village is similar to a lonely dark cloud roaming in the sky fearlessly, which proves to be a significant landmark in choosing his particular mode of being. The narrator reflects on the possibility of different modes of being through the discussion of various characters of the novel. This difference is entirely based on the decision taken by an individual in a particular situation. At one occasion Parsinni, Modan’s neighbourer and a friend of his mother, says, “…some people enjoy themselves all their lives without a single care, and some spend all their lives weeping…” Parsinni’s words here contain symbolic significance in the sense that they suggest two entirely different and opposite modes of being, or two entirely different styles of leading one’s life. The representatives of the first mode of being – who spend their lives without care like a fearless cloud roaming in the sky– are Ruldu and Modan. Spending one’s life without care, as according to the philosophy of Sartre, is quite opposite to the manner of being-for-others – the manner of living where one’s existence is dominated and affected by others. The one who decides to lead one’s life without care automatically diminishes his possibility of being in the state of being-for-others. Such type of being does not leave space for others to take the central position. He does not get affected by the gaze of the others and hence prove to be very difficult and stoic being to be objectified. The second mode of being – who spend their lives weeping – is represented by Chhottu. Modan’s attitude towards Chhottu is sympathetic but when he feels that he has clubbed with with Sajjan and the sons of Ghana, he says:

In what way are you different from them, prey? You’re his brother after all. Everyone selfishly inclines towards the loaded side of the scale, and you have proved no better, the way you’ve teamed up with them…but let me tell you, this is no way for a man to behave!…. Chhottu could take no more of this …and he slipped away quietly. (100)
The stoic mode of being also includes mental agony, loneliness and anguish because the heroes often enter a permanent state of rebellion till they take their life to the bitter end i.e. death. The priorities Modan sets for himself do not possess any meaning in the lives of his brothers. By moving on this path he is ready to accept the futility of his struggles against whom he is fighting. It further helps Modan to understand the totalization of the situation in which he is aware of his subjective position from the points of view of others. In this situation, the thing that keeps on encouraging Modan to fight back, despite being aware of the minimal hope of his success, is his will power, his desire to “exhaust the limits of the possible.” The element which corroborates his being on the path of heroism is his stoic behaviour and his ability to stay away from the manner which Sartre calls the state of being-for-others.

There is another side of his being which is full of love and care. He fights against only those who represent or try to make any bond with the establishment. For Bhani, her son and Ruldu, his heart is always full of love and care. It is not the unfulfilled sexual desire, as most readers or the psychoanalytical critics may interpret, that enforces him to extinguish his anger on his enemies when he goes to their house to attack them. It is his own conscious decision and his heroic mode of being i.e. leading one’s life with self-respect which leads him to take violent action against Ghanekian.

If we compare the existential situation of Modan with Parsa, we would easily be convinced that both characters exercise their freedom of choice to determine their particular ways of living. Parsa’s father, like him, was a brave and stoic man. If Parsa exactly behaves like his father, it is not the case that he is accepting the situation as it is offered to him but it is his own conscious decision to give value to the ways of living his forefathers had. “A man’s character and his action, then, arise out of the way in which, perceiving the world, he evaluates it; and his evaluations are entirely his own. No one can force me to value something high or low. Even if I take over my opinions from someone else, they become mine and I choose them…. that our values are all of them chosen freely by us must have consequences for the possibility of constructing an
ethical theory…. If a man says that something is good or that it is bad, he is choosing it as a goal; he is not describing a property that it has…. To suppose that values are somehow given is just to fall into the refusal of… his freedom…. Value is, he [Sartre] says, ‘simply lived’ at the very heart of our life. We perceive things, evaluate them, and act upon them, all at the same time. But there can be no theory of values. All that a philosopher can do is to tell us what value is, and how it functions in our life. He cannot possibly presume to tell us what is and what is not valuable” (Warnock 123-24). Sartre therefore emphatically asserts that man is free to negate his mode of being at any time and if he prolongs with the same values it is the result of his own freedom of choice. Modan, behaving quite opposite to Parsa, negates the mode of being of his father and chooses to be a different man. His image, for the most part, resembles with Parsa and Bishna for asserting his freedom of choice and on a larger level with the legendary heroes of Punjab. This heroic mode of being, to which Modan gives value, has its own hardships. The heroes often feel lonely and tragic towards the end of their lives. But still they know that there is something which is more meaningful than the anguish they experience and it is their subjectivity which they do not loose even at the cost of their existence.