CHAPTER-I

The Re-presentation of Traumatic Pasts: Amandeep Sandhu’s Roll of Honour

In the aftermath of Operation Bluestar, the Sikh community lost its social contract and faith in the nation. Even after thirty-four years of the attack on the Golden Temple at Amritsar, many Sikhs and non-Sikhs around the world remember this event among the most brutal acts of violence in Indian history. After three decades, people have started making dialogues on 1984, Operation Bluestar and its aftermath; authors and reporters are not only writing about it but are also sharing their own stories based on their experiences and witnessing. In addition to often partisan interpretations of the Indian government’s assault on the Golden Temple, numerous notable literary accounts depicting the 1984 events have been produced and circulated that have also shaped the popular imagination regarding Operation Bluestar. For those who did not live in India during 1984, literary accounts and the media remained the only source of information and opinion-forming about the historical facts of the period. And when the historical events are violent and traumatic, the debate about accurate re-presentation becomes particularly contested. Writers like Khushwant Singh, Amitav Ghosh, Ranjit Guha had written a lot about the atrocities of Punjab 1984. In actuality, it took more than two decades to address the problems and issues of Punjab 1984. The literature in Hindi, English, and other languages has begun to lead the way out of that impasse. In English, the events of 1984 have evoked more non-fiction works as compared to fiction. Much is written on anti-Sikh riots as compared to terrorism or the period of insurgency and counter-insurgency in Punjab.

Amandeep Sandhu, a new young voice from Punjab, has written two semi-autobiographical novels, Sepia Leaves and Roll of Honour. Both deal with the trauma, one in the domestic sphere depicting the struggles of a family to come to terms with schizophrenia, and the other deals with the public and political domain, insurgency, terrorism, Khalistan, the 1984 mass massacre of Sikhs in Delhi, communal discord and male child sexual abuse. The unifying thread between the two novels is mental illness and religious conflicts. Sandhu’s Roll of Honour was shortlisted for The Hindu
Prize for Best Fiction, 2013. In the year 2014, the book was translated into Punjabi language by Daljit Ami, a Punjabi documentary filmmaker and journalist. The title of the translated text is *Gwah de Fanna Hon to Pehlan (Before the Witness Ceases to be)*. Thus it is equally important to know how a text is received and the way it triggers past memories of a shared grief. The translated text was released in October 2014 during the Chandigarh Literary Fest which started with a dialogue on “30 years of Operation Bluestar”. While addressing the audience, Sandhu shared his personal experiences and recalled spending days in the lockup for wearing a turban, facing police atrocities, and ransom threats by terrorists. Sandhu confesses that he grappled with trauma for years until he decided to write about it. Ami shared that he felt that this book contained his own story, his own narrative. Moreover, he feels that the text has a specific space for him which helped him to translate this text. It took Sandhu five long years to write this novel while it took a mere five weeks for Ami to translate the same text.

Generally, imagination and memory act in conjunction with each other. The moment we are immersed in a musical or a fictional narrative, what we derive from it through our imaginative engagement becomes interwoven with our own social and historical experience. As Emily Keightley and Pickering consider that cultural and aesthetic experiences involving the imagination are many and varied, and the role of imagination in them is regarded as “legitimate or appropriate” once used in a negative or pejorative sense, the values of imagination for processes of recollection are inevitably called into question (2).

Memory is commonly seen as a constructive and a reconstructive process but when we see where imagination contributes to this process, we find a large and unacknowledged gap. Experience is an important analytical category for memory studies because it is central to the relations of the past, present, and the future that are germane to the whole field. The common distinction among experience as process, a lived experience, and experience as a product, assimilated experience (the knowledge crystallised out of previous experience) correlates with the equally common distinction between the process of remembering and memory as the product resulting from that activity.
This chapter offers an analysis of the artistic techniques used by the author in order to understand how he or she (re)members, (re)imagines, and finally (re)constructs fragmented personal memories and stories. The chapter has been divided into two segments. In the first one, memory is studied as an experience and in the second, it is analyzed as a creative process. Across time we change, and since memory provides a complex set of links back into the past, much of our analytical focus is initially on how, in particular life-trajectories, there are certain constituent features which define us in recollection even as we change, and help us relate our successive selves to each other in terms of who we were, are, and might become. The novel, *Roll of Honour*, a semi-autobiographical writing, acknowledges this intricacy of the act of remembrance. The reading of the novel helps to understand the underlying subtexts of the collective and the individual memory that bear the imprint of a troubled past and is, in consequence, shaped by it. Sandhu describes the effect of political persecution of individuals and how that experience and its memories in turn, shape the lives of those affected. Through a complex texture of personal memories and trauma, the novel ends with renewed hope, which is not only a hope concerning an individual’s future but also a revisiting of the past with a renewed sense of it. It is a way of looking back at the past where one can learn and unlearn numerous things.

In such processes, the creative work required is accomplished by the mnemonic imagination, and as such, it is across time a key component of identity formation and maintenance (9). Mnemonic imagination connects the relation between an individual and the collective memory. It puts forth the idea that no form is either individual or collective in any singular or unified sense. The sociological dimension and cultural psychology of remembering are two different insights to understand memory. All too often these two dimensions of memory have been considered separately and the dynamic nature of their relationship has been neglected. In early psychological and some philosophical accounts, the social aspect of remembering was ignored and the idea that memory is an individual faculty was upheld.

In contrast, more recent sociological accounts of the collective cultural memory have obscured the role of the individual as an agent in the processes and the practices of collective remembering. This can be avoided by focusing conceptually on
the relations between the situated and the mediated experience. The mnemonic imagination facilitates the transactional movement necessary for their coexistence, and when necessary helps realign the personal and the popular memory through an inter-lamination of these two dimensions of identity and experience.

*Roll of Honour* is a story of the split loyalties of a Sikh boy who is studying in the twelfth standard in a military school in the fictional town of Jassabad, Punjab. As he enters in class twelfth, the senior most class in the school, he looks forward to three things: - being class in-charge, completing high secondary, and getting a place in the National Defence Academy. He wants to get his name listed in the school’s hall of fame, the “Roll of Honour”. In the meantime, the situation in Punjab turns vicious. The Indian Army at the behest of the Indian Government carries out Operation Bluestar for eliminating the Khalistan militants who are holed up in the Golden Temple. In the operation, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwala, the chief advocate of Khalistan, is killed along with his associates. These happenings affect the environment in the military school as well. The Khalistan movement splits the students of the military school along the sectarian lines of Hinduism and Sikhism. The supporters of Khalistan movement in the school defend Bhindrawala and want to tread the same path while the others want to be part of the nation, India.

At many points in the text where experience and memory integrally cross-refer, they are shared with others and socially defined by the contexts of occurrences and yet are also imbued with the quality of ‘being mine’, of being conceived as indispensable to an embodied self-identity and how we think of ourselves as individual persons. The public and the personal aspects of memory imply different evaluations of the meanings associated with them. These qualitatively distinct assessments are important even though shared experience and what is considered as private are in many respects interwoven. “The term ‘experience’ has various manifestations, and historically has been used to address and validate many different ideas, so any attempt to give it a singular or absolute definitional sense would be a failure on the part of an individual to recognize its multiple applications and varied developments across a number of different fields” (Keightley and Pickering 19).
The novel operates on the premise that the experience can be conceived as traversing the space between the individual subject and social institutions. It is through this contingent, often uneasy, yet unavoidable movement that experience becomes the interspace within which we negotiate our self-identity, and the ways in which these do, or do not, match up to each other. This interspace is one that is always temporarily configured for within it the play between the remembering subject, the experience remembered, and the social forces that intervene in this relation are continually changing. At any particular juncture in our lives, experiences, in part, are directed and shaped by our own agency, and in part by conditions and pressures outside our individual control or command. It is always manifest in a dialect process moving between possibility and limit, aspiration and constraint. As a result, we all experience events or long-term processes of change in individual ways, but we do not individually arrange or superintend all the experiences we have. Some of them may come unexpectedly around the nearest corner and knock us sideways. In spite of this, we are responsible for our own lives and the quality of the narrative pattern and distinction they attain. Experience is never exclusively personal or public, interiorised or outwardly facing, self-directed or the blind product of social forces. It crosses between these mutually informing categories and in that movement is formed the synthesis of self-definition and definition provided by others that we call the self.

*Roll of Honour* can be understood better on the basis of the two primary insights of memory studies: social determinism and psychological essentialism. From the beginning to the end, Sandhu’s narrative works both for and against his salvation. He is at once a victim, a rebel, and at once a silent spectator (20). Selfhood, is then, the reflexive sense of who we are as individuals, defined in relation to other people who are both like and unlike us in a whole range of ways. This reflexive sense draws upon remembered experience. “Remembering is therefore always retrospectively part of our temporally unfolding experience, and so occurs at definite points of time within the intermediate space between the individual subject and institutional orders” (Keightley and Pickering 20). It is then manifest as an active process of arranging the past into a relatively coherent narrative of personhood situated in particular sets of social relations.

The metaphor of Lord Shiva’s *Trishul*, the three pointed blades, is used significantly which displays writer’s own torn mind, “first, loss of the physical world
of social status (school) the second is sodomy and the third is “the denial of justice to Sikhs in riots.” While using the term “borrowed memory”, Halbwachs gives a way to the idea of extended memory, the memory we have of historical events that we did not experience and of which we received knowledge either through the state education, books, and from parents or from other sources. This specific part of individual memory that is not really ‘ours’, is rather ‘borrowed’ from alternate sources. Likewise, he provides the notion of “Fata Morgana Effect” which demonstrates the ways in which the exterior or public memory can influence our own personal thoughts. “The Fata Morgana effect” constitutes memories of historical events, particularly traumatic events, which are time and again resurrected for political benefits. Appu’s external identity is linked to being born Sikh, but as the novel progresses we learn that he has taken a journey beyond labels, beyond being rewarded to a level. Appu finally releases his demons and finds his salvation in words. Through words, he tends to reconcile with the painful memories once and for all. The novel states, “Words are not only combinations of letters of the alphabet and symbols; they are vehicles of intent that come from deep convictions, from intuition. Sense does not come from reading letters but by listening to one’s intuition” (126). The novel clearly shows that his present experience always gets influenced by traumatic sites past memories.

The year 2002 is an important landmark in the author’s memory. His trauma is triggered by the Godhra riots and there are numerous instances where the readers get the idea that this novel is affected by his visit to Ayodhya after the riots. He sets out to explore the dynamics of communal violence. He travels to Ayodhya to study the Hindu-Muslim riots in the wake of the Babri Mosque demolition. Sandhu explicitly compares Operation Bluestar and the act of sodomy. The dark shades of past have been haunting him for the last two decades. He could not figure out the problems and the fears he had in his mind. “The not knowing was a fear in itself: like the barrel of the gun that pointed at me that dark night in the fields. I sought to know the unknown” (226). The first step of writing begins in 2002 but unable to articulate anything substantial, he compares his state of mind with his schizophrenic mother. Appu defines how difficult it was for him to tell the truth, “I never felt satisfied with what I
had written” (72). He starts forgetting things and feels fragmented. His mother’s psychiatrist advised him to continue writing. He said, “It will break you. Then build you” (230). Sandhu makes a powerful case for the need to articulate the tales of the pain of survival.

It is also important to note that experience is, for example, implicated in our considered assessments of whose memory we may trust and whose not, what constitutes the reliable remembered evidence of a past event or when it may be appropriate to broach people’s memories of certain events in the past and act upon them in the present (Keightley and Pickering 23). This is just one example of the ways in which experience negotiates between the social in the selfhood and the selfhood a social constitution. Experience is the interspace where this negotiation occurs. The events, characters, timelines, and spaces in this novel are plotted variously on the matrix of reality but the essences are real. For him, the act of writing is a way to seek truth and writing this novel, a healing experience. However, the events of 1984 bring many unforeseen alterations in his life. It is the reflection of his experience, the way he lost his honor, the way he was humiliated by his seniors and the way teachers betrayed him and his expectations which become fundamental to the narrative. Then words offer him the space which physical rape, emotional outrage, and schizophrenia deprive him of. In the end, the novel comes back to the present time, and finally, he meets A1, his school friend, after years and their hugs display their unspoken pain of loss, loss of infinite moments. A1 read out the excerpts of the book from where he left the school. A1 considers that “No perspective is bigger than your imagination” (236). Appu recalls his Baba’s words “In the beginning of your life, you have faced a challenge. Will you run away or face it”. By the end, he stands against his fears, confusions, and dilemmas and creates a space for himself.

The story fluctuates between memoir and fiction as it traces the trajectory of Appu’s life from innocence to experience. Sandhu also has supported his fictional narrative with factual accounts of events, presenting information about Bhindranwale’s stance with regards to the history of the independence movement. Appu describes how Prem uncle played cassette tapes of Bhindranwale’s famous speeches. Once Appu visited Prem uncle during his summer break and the latter played out a part of Bhindrawala’s speeches where he had responded to the demand for an independent state for Sikhs: “We don’t oppose Khalistan, nor do we support it.
We wish to live in India as equal citizens, not as slaves. It is the central government’s business to decide whether it wants to keep the turbaned people or not” (121).

The author’s state of mind, aggression, wounds, moreover trauma, could not get a straight outlet but is shown through different points of views. The story proceeds two alternating timelines both narrated by the protagonist Appu: adolescent and present. By means of two alternating timelines, the story depicts the daily life and dilemma of a young boy in a military school during the dark period of terrorism. Throughout the novel, events and incidents are depicted through memory which is all at once, personal and collective, cultural and prosthetic, and plays out as only the author’s imagination which gives shape to the entire plot and the point of view of the novel. Readers can hear the thoughts of the narrator and see the world depicted in the story through Appu’s eye. The framework through various turns in the narrative also makes transparent the matrices of oppressive, hierarchical and discriminatory ideologies, practices and politics.

Relative dictions may be made between an experience as it was felt and apprehended in the past and how it has been reflected upon since, but it is the meaning cannot be said to run clear throughout without posing an unerring and static self as the guarantor of such continuity. This is one of the problems we all encounter when we think about our own memories and how we relate to them in a relentlessly successive series of present moments and consciousness. The remembering subject is always in the process of becoming and so always in some way changing. Nevertheless, we continue to distinguish between past experiences and the experience of remembering in our lives as they are lived in a specific present. This distinction is central to experience as a temporal relation. Even though its meanings and how these are evaluated may change, there is a certain continuity extending from the past experience into the remembering experience (Keightley and Pickering 24).

Stephen Crites argues that a narrative is inherently the formal quality of experience as it is mediated by narrative, we hear or read a sequenced ensemble of words and sentences, with its own temporal unfolding, but it is the narrative which structures the experience of being remembered, told and heard: experience can derive a specific sense of its own temporal course in a coherent world only by being informed by a qualifying structure that gives temporal contours to its own forms (34). The act of recollection through narrative illuminates our experience. It is a narrative
which supplies a degree of continuity across the discontinuities between past, present, and future, and the narrative that is implicit in the possibility of experience must be such that it can absorb both the chronicle of memory and the scenario of anticipation, absorb them within a richer narrative form without effacing the difference between the determinacy of the one and the interdeterminancy of the other (35). The reader should be able to experience first-hand “the social and human motives which led men to think, feel, and act just as they did in historical reality”. Through historical fact and fiction, the reader is thus able to gain a greater understanding of a specific period and why people acted as they did. Thus, in its search for “poetic truth,” the novel, *Roll of Honour*, “tries to create a sense of what the past was, without necessarily adhering to all the factual details and by eliminating facts not essential to the story” (Slotkin 225).

For Hayden White, the difference between factual and fictional discourse is the one, which is occupied by what is “true” and the other by what is “real” (147). Historical documents may provide a basis for a “true account of the world” in a certain time and place, but they are limited in their capacity to act as a foundation for the exploration of all aspects of “reality.” In White’s words:

> The rest of the real, after we have said what we can assert to be true about it, would not be everything and anything we could imagine about it. The real would consist of everything that can be truthfully said about its actuality plus everything that can be truthfully said about what it could possibly be (479).

White’s main point is that both history and fiction are interpretative by nature. Historians, for their part, interpret given evidence from a subjective viewpoint; this means that it cannot be unbiased. In the words of Beverley Southgate, “factual history is revealed as subjectively chosen, subjectively interpreted, subjectively constructed, and incorporated within a narrative” (45). Both fiction and history are narratives, and “anyone who writes a narrative is fictionalising” (cited in Southgate 32).

The historian’s purpose differs from that of the novelist. Historians examine the historical record in fine details in an attempt to understand its complexities, and then use digressions and footnotes to explain and lend authority to their findings. The novelist, on the other hand, uses their imagination to create personalities and plot and can leave out important details; the novelist achieves authenticity through a detailed and creative description of the setting, customs, culture, buildings, and so on.
Nevertheless, the main task of both history and fiction writing is to represent the past to a reader in the present; this “shared concern with the construction of meaning through narrative” is a major component in the long-lasting, close relationship between fiction and history (Southgate 19). Consequently, writers from their own crucial memories and experiences tend to formulate remembered narratives or what they are writing about.

Memory and imagination are closely linked, though significantly distinct. On one hand memory is a vital resource for imagining, and on the other hand, imagining is a vital process in making coherent sense of the past and connecting it to the present and future. Life narratives are constructed just as much out of how we imagine our memories as fitting together in retrospect. On the other hand, of course, distortion, exaggeration, falsification, even, an outright invention may exist and these may derive from the imagination as well as from various ideological forms and frames. What we imagine may not necessarily be rooted in any verifiable memory, but the possibility of this does not in itself deny the positive role which imagination plays in the narrative development of a life-story or the reconstruction of past experiences.

In a single text, Sandhu is dealing with a chain of subjects- a school and a community that is at loggerheads with a nation. It explores how violence plays out on young adolescent minds, inside state-funded schools, how bullying takes place, at the physical and the ideological level. The novel stirs plethora of images, it takes us to Amritsar to the Bangla Sahib Gurudwara in Delhi, to the refugee camps, to the houses of boys who were ‘picked up’ by the police, to the field of Punjab where boys with broken finger ripped out finger nails, empty-eye sockets, and swollen tongues would hang to canals where they would bleed. His observation is remarkable he writes, “Of all that transpires in the heart, hope is the meanest because it tints one’s understanding of reality” (13).

_Bura jo dekhan mai chala, buran na milya koe,

jo ghat khoja apna, mujh se buran na koe._

[When I went to look for evil, I found

None as wretched as my own heart]. –Kabir

This is the epigraph of the novel which demonstrates the idea that both darkness and light coexist within the human heart. The conflict, internal as well as external, is the
point where he starts questioning in terms of belonging. The book consisting of 242 pages and deals with three issues-trauma, violence, and sexuality. The sexual abuse prevalent among the boys, the bullying of the juniors by senior most boys and teachers was the subculture of the school. The multi-layered conflicts and images of darkness and pain are intense and severe. Words like ‘betrayal’ ‘rape’, ‘violence’ recur several times in the novel. A list of other words (wound, pain, remember, torture, pettiness) is enough to testify that the novel goes beyond what is explicitly implied. The historical and political facts in the narrative are not ends in themselves but simply a means of depicting a social process operating on the subject.

Experience for the basis for thinking of the past and looking forward. As it links up with memory and remembering in any given present, but how this linkage occurs is something that needs to be examined. The chapter discusses the dynamic relationship between immediate and congealed experiences on one hand and remembering and memory on the other. Experience, as lived and interpreted, is necessarily registered in the interspace between selfhood and social order. While unfolding in time, experience acts back on that process of development across time, and memory is the key to this transactional movement. It is in such movement that we can first identify its creative potential; “both experience and memory are viewed as personal and social, situated and mediated, proximate and distant” (Keightley and Pickering 4).

While taking “experience” as an analytical category for thinking about memory, for what is selected and absorbed from it, constitutes the unavoidable autobiographical material from which life-stories are achieved in the temporally defined construction of personal identity. The point is what are the different elements involved in this negotiation and in both discovering and constructing a sense of pattern and structure in our experience across time is the concern dealt with in this chapter. Its production is the work of the remembering subject, but what is being worked with is difficult to describe, not least because experience makes the remembering subject just as much as it makes the remembered self. The system, the situation of the school and the state, has entangled Appu and even in his thirties he often feels that this recurrent trauma has made his ‘self’ and soul fragile. After all, he stakes more than twenty-five years of his life by experiencing the mental suffering and intense agony of those times and situations. Consequently, he decides to sort out the conflicts and the dilemmas of his mind through his act of writing and eventually
writes this novel. He comes to deal with the reality of his circumstance and informs the readers that why Appu could not leave the school, despite the menace and disorder in the school system. There were essentially two reasons. The first reason was financial as Appu's parents would have been forced to reimburse the free scholarship awarded to him if he were to drop out before graduation, something they could not have afforded to do. The second reason is that he assumed that the class will be able to retain their dignity through their conduct.

Experience, as it is recollected and reassessed, is both temporally continuous and temporally specific, and as any particular mode or modality of experience develops into a definite social form in which we participate, it is continuously subject to change, transformation, and succession. The past not only piles up behind us but also varies in its meaning and significance as experience is subject to relentless disruption, loss, and renewal. This creates a problem for the remembering subject as to what constitutes experience. Is it the object of memory when subsequent experience has changed so much? Or is it how that previous experience is conceived, interpreted and understood?

The novel begins with a flashback to the year 1984 and the intensity of the memory is immediately communicated through the first person narrative which deals with author's own mind and speaks of his own involvement in the past. The novel opens with the following words which underscore the role of memory and trauma. "I ran away. Two and a half decades ago, when a revolver kissed me, I was then studying in a military school in Punjab" (1). The novel takes the reader twenty-five years back when Appu runs away from Punjab to Hyderabad and settles in Bangalore. But he is unable to sleep due to numerous overwhelming fears of guilt, helplessness, and dilemma. He could not be oblivious of the muzzle that kissed him, as Sandhu writes:

Yet I could not sleep. I could not forget how the black narrow circle of muzzle had looked at me and how I had looked at it. How my knees had trembled. How I could have been killed. Since 1984, the stench of fear has plagued me. Sometimes, I wish the bullet had ended this story there and then it had remained untold (1).

The words like anguish, pain, suffering, and toil manifest Appu's own experience of the turmoil of 1984. He found himself helpless and his mind actually became plagued.
Though he tried to run away from his agonizing predicament he could not find an escape from the traumatic memories he experienced during the last year of his school. “I can’t go past those years; the loaded revolver of unknown make remains stuck in my mind” (3). It is the ceaseless struggle to comprehend, reconcile and rehabilitate a successful attempt to show the human condition in those adversities and he wants to comprehend the physical and the mental violence he faced during his formative years.

The transformative potential of memory is attenuated and the role of remembering is limited to the repetition of the past rather than being seen as central to the creative production of meaning about the past, the present, and the future in their various interrelations. In memory the past is not directly transmitted to us in its pristine form; it comes back to us only in fragments out of which we puzzle together their connections and distinctions, patterns and configurations. Sandhu started writing the novel in 2005 and compiled it in the year 2012. The first draft was written in 1500 pages and later it was compressed to 237 pages. But he remembers his experience and the images of burning houses, weeping men and bloated corpses floating in the canals on the edges of the fields. Though he leaves the sites of horror and that traumatic memory in time and space, he cannot get rid of the fear of past experiences. The journey of the writing starts in Delhi the place where he had witnessed the violence of 1984: “After living in Bangalore for eleven years, in order to find my sleep, I decided to return closer to the site where my fear had begun”(1). Delhi has a unique place in his memory as he had watched Sikhs being incinerated during 1984 riots after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. He starts staying at a rented barsati behind the Nizamuddin Dargah. He did not meet any of his schoolmates until he completed this novel. Although many tried to get in touch with him through social networking sites he did not respond to anyone. Sandhu writes:

I realize I do not want to meet anyone because I wanted to preserve the story in my mind the way I thought it had played out. I am scared that if I meet others, they would change my understanding of the story… and when we meet, we might reach new understanding or new differences, and I fear his version could be too different from how I have kept the story alive in my head all these years, lived with it (30).

Sandhu does not want anyone to mutilate his story rather he wants to write his own story in his own way, with his own insights the way he experienced and looked at the
incidents of 1984. Life in the military school affords distinct challenges. The life of a disciplined soldier is to be attained by undergoing the agonizing process of *ragra* (punishment). The regular classroom teachings play a secondary role here and inculcating discipline is the priority of the school. The pivotal position in the *ragra* lies with the school prefect. However, the events of 1984 bring many unforeseen alterations in their lives. Appu finds himself giving refuge to an ex-student, Balraj, who is now a Khalistani militant, and who escapes the army. A school which functioned with pride and is in isolation now sees its very basic dynamics being affected by the events taking place outside. Students are annoyed and old friends are forced to take sides. Sandhu also paints a gruesome picture of the bullying which takes place in school-activities unspeakable. The dire lure of authority and almost an intoxicating desire for seniority in Appu's school led to an acute urge for dominating the juniors - mentally, physically and sexually. Punishments or *’ragra’* were ruthless enough to cause bleeding, broken bones, and medical centre trips. Thereby sodomy emerges as the most preferred tool of domination:

It is male rape. Male rape. He who becomes a gandu gets fucked, loses his respect. I talked to Lalten and he asked me to avoid the seniors and do the following: never look straight into a senior’s eye, it provoked them; never let a senior catch you alone; never wear anything without nadas and tie the knot if a senior asked you to remove your clothes; like in jungle camps, never go to the bathroom alone at night (80).

There is a duality of structure inherent in experience which is characterized by its continual unfolding in time while also acting back on that continuing development across time. The significance of this is that while experience has a backward and a forward quality to it within any particular situation in time, in apprehending the relationship between the past and present meanings of an experience, it is through memory that we impart a transactional movement to the duality. The movement which is then realized in the transaction ensures that both these dimensions of experience over time are kept in play, operating with mutual reference of each other in our sense of a life being lived. Remembering as an active process of ongoing reconstruction and rearrangement is what gives meaning and significance to experience in the continuing and the dynamic interrelationship of its lived and learned dimensions.
Continuities in experiences are reconstructed over time in the context of the changes which the passage of time brings, with memory itself changing in its interconnected patterns of meaning, significance and value. Secondly, it is in relation to such changing patterns that we strive imaginatively to re-engage with past experience and carry it forward as a relatively coherent narrative. Much of our mundane day-to-day experience is forgotten, yet we attempt to collect together the fragments left in the wake of what is lost and reassemble them so that they form some sort of a credible and self-enhancing story. Without that lived experience the story would be a mere flux and we would have little sense of a temporally extended personal and social identity upon which we and others closest to us can, in some way, rely. What we recall of an earlier experience is rarely, if ever, that experience as a whole and this requires us to build imaginatively on what we recollect and make connections across time, always with the imperative need of the present shaping what we bring back, and bring together, at any particular stage in time.

Appu’s dilemma starts right from the very first day of his final year at school when the tradition of school prefect was scrapped and he had to be content with becoming the class in-charge. The second incident of being at crossroads arrive for him when he is unable to stand against his supercilious, bullying, Khalistan-supporting classmates, who consider Appu as a traitor because of his short hair. Moreover, he cannot support his Hindu friends because for them, after all, he is a Sikh and his heart also confirms his Sikh identity. The third instance occurs when the class splits into pro-Khalistan and anti-Khalistan groups due to the presence of Balraj, thus the violence outside the school crosses over inside the school. He is always stuck between being one with his class and being truthful. The school is treated as a microcosm of India’s religious and ethnic groups comprising this class and explores unflinching human instincts and perspective that reflect and parallel the broken social and political system outside the school.

Appu symbolizes the reflection of the youth of Punjab, an essential site, where their secure world, as they know it, is threatened, beliefs shattered and a loved one taken away for a reason they cannot comprehend. While the world plunges into explicit turmoil outside the secure gates of these young cadets who are trained to be the future warriors of the country they do not remain naive anymore and their loyalties are unclear. Religion has drawn a line between the people of the state and
that line runs through the heart of the school as well. Appu and other cadets are no longer sure about the direction of their lives or the stance they should take.

The novel travels from his act of ‘wekhan’ (to see things) to act of ‘samjhan’ (to understand). Author’s imagination, personal memory, and experiences converge and become tools in the formation of this novel. Through the act of writing, Sandhu not only shares the experience of the ‘self’ but also highlights the collective trauma that he experienced with his generation. The young Appu wants to see past events and incidents happening around because he could neither relate nor understand the dilemma through which he was actually passing. He confronts social and political dissonance that gives rise to political battles over power and control. The narrative is written in the way that the life of school boys signifies the microcosm of India’s religious and ethnic group conflicts. Appu struggles with divided loyalties and examines a loss of innocence, what it was to be civilized, and the role of religion, power, and control and what it means to make different choices than what is expected or encouraged. This is the story of the role of honor in a community which has lost its dignity and integrity in the dark days of terrorism. Sandhu raises certain questions but is unable to provide all the answers. As is aptly put on the back cover, this book “is a frank examination of the consequences of misplaced honour, allegiance, and integrity”. With the passage of time, Appu understands that one’s perception towards past keeps on changing. He gets the idea that the more we try to understand, the more it gets complex. “Maybe ‘Wekhan’ was not at all ‘Samjhan’, understanding, was what I needed and through understanding, a way of judging. ‘Pehchan’”(233). Although Appu fails to fulfill his father’s dream, his way of life and decisions are guided by his father’s spirit of words and it is mentioned in the novel: “Baba had expected something from me. My confusion had interfered with his dreams and the same confusion was now leading me to find my space” (233).

Looking at experiences as a source material for this autobiographical memory leads to a question: how does memory work in recounting experiences and thus narrating a self? The answer is manifold. First, the individual subject acts not only as an authorial self, continually scripting the story of a particular life, but also as a sort of editor-in-chief of the memories made to matter and cohere in the preferred version of who we think we are. “The remembering self is then principally an editorial self that consciously or unconsciously selects the memories that wrap us around with the sense
of our dignity, our erotic power, our nonchalance, our goodwill towards mankind, all those pleasures that our self-consideration craves” (Albright 223).

This implies that self-identity rests entirely on memory. While at times these cross-temporal associations may be defined primarily in terms of our own individual pattern of life-experience, there is of course throughout a dynamic interplay between individual and collective experience and the memories that move between these categories, something in relation with conflict and contradiction. As the writer reflects on his experiences and the contingent, unpredictable ways, in which he understands himself through them, he keeps on drawing his past experiences and his own memories, defective though he felt, “I am full of cracks and leaking everywhere”. The engagement with history and politics in the novel is intricately interspersed with the vivid gruesome and disconcerting account of male sexuality as a source of power and a site of domination. Appu watches boys being attracted to each other and goes through the same himself. He is attracted to women as expected at that age, but has no access to any. He has witnessed a friend being killed and the image of his body being dragged out haunts him. Every now and then, between various arguments and fights, he goes through a mental war within himself. He examines the scenario through two perspectives: a writer revisiting the adolescence and an adolescent reconciling his ambition to join the army with a series of events unfolding in Punjab. It is imperative to note here that experience and memory by which the events are recalled are both “finite and fragmentary”. It is an active reconstruction process in which any conception of what links our successive selves across time is partly dependent on the past and partly upon “different circumstances” and “other considerations” to those which may have preoccupied us during previous stages of our lives:

Since there is no firm footing for the mind, the remembering subject faces an unstable and shifting terrain of accumulated experience on which to make ‘assays’ and is himself always in movement, according to both intention and chance - ‘I am then another self’. The remembering self is prone to error and divagation” (Keightley and Pickering 16).

The need is to create a sense of coherent meaning in our life-narrative. Most of us manage to achieve certain consistencies of attitude and aptitude, certain ways of seeing and doing, across the continual redrafting of our remembered autobiographical script. The redrafting of memories of our past experience is always in process, always
a cumulative assemblage of what was recalled at different stages of our lives by successive versions of the person whose memory was thereby revised, but it is nevertheless around these relative consistencies, and what we try to hold onto in our ongoing re-evaluations of experience, that our sense of ourselves across the particular times in our lives hangs together and perjures.

The individual subject is a product of experience in the dual senses of having to respond to social forces, norms, conventions, institutions, and of being able to accept responsibility for self-initiated actions, take certain critical steps and make potentially innovative moves. In both ways, experience changes us: on the one hand because we cannot control certain experiences that lead to change, and on the other hand because we cannot change what we experience. Keightley agrees that experience as it occurs and is manifest in both directions also affects what we remember” but in complicated, sometimes unpredictable ways. Partly because the ongoing experience is a changeable attitude of what is familiar and the unexpected, with both having repercussions for what gets brought up in process of remembering.

The narrative of the novel is not linear. There are smooth transitions between the past and the present. The storyline of the novel is interspersed with ‘italicised musing’ of the narrator, Appu. The continuous flashbacks not only help us know the events but also make us realize how the same incidents get colored by Appu’s interpretation as he grows older or as the situation around him changes. The brutality is disturbing but that the story demanded it and the author’s intention was probably to shock his readers. The language used in the first part of the novel is strong and explicit. It fits well with the narrative. The other timeline is in the present or near past when Appu is a grown man and finally comes to terms with what happened to him during that 1984, the permanent effects the event bore on him, and to such an extent that it took twenty-five years to absorb it all before coming out on the side of the survivor. This part of the narrative is more thought driven. The language used to narrate this part is more beautiful and artistic.

The past and present interface of the novel reveals that it would proceed with the idea of recreating the past from the present perspective. The act of writing has become an act of memorizing violence which gradually becomes a tool to construct the narrative spiraling a part of contrived memory. The novel shows how the recollection of traumatic past represents trauma and loss, solace and survival. In the
aftermath of Operation Bluestar, the Sikh boys were joining the Khalistan movement, turning militants, while the army was arresting and killing the Sikh militants; guilty or innocent— notwithstanding. Sandhu provides vivid and graphic details of various scenes, and readers are informed of the realities of what life was like for Sikhs in Punjab in 1984. The novel describes how the demolition of the Golden Temple and the death of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale coincided with the abduction and killing of his friend, Joga. Joga’s body was found by a canal, dumped there by the local police. Appu recalls how the corpse was left battered and disgraced, with the boy’s hair shaved off, “Rigor mortis had set in and Joga’s body had bloated. His trousers were torn. His naked back had purple welts. His tormentors had broken his fingers” (20). Appu is not sure whether the army or the local police had been responsible for Joga’s death, but his confusion and disappointment with his homeland are evident:

I did not understand why the Indian government and the army considered the Gurdwaras to be dangerous, priests to be traitors, leaders to be renegades and people with turbans—the Sikhs—to be enemies (18).

The journey of the novel unfolds in nine chapters and the titles of the chapters are taken from the famous poem The Second Coming by W.B. Yeats. The nine chapters in the novel mark a kind of transformation in the evolution of Appu’s consciousness, as it enables him to re-order his scattered memories in search of a cohesive existence. Every time he visits his own past, his long-suppressed personal losses and pains are gradually released into the ever-widening spirals of betrayal, guilt, helplessness, and suffering. Appu’s emotional pain and suffering cause this narrative to come into being. Ironically, he comes close to his past through his trauma. Twenty-five years back, he had come out of the system of ‘uniform’ and codes but could not get peace even in a changed geographic setup. It is Appu’s repressed pains and agony that enable him to go from the realm of ignorance to the realm of knowledge, from ‘political unconsciousness’ to political consciousness. The word ‘betrayal’ has been used more than twenty times in the text. The profusion with which the word has been used indicates that his trauma is not only related to physical violence but mental torture as well. It surfaces his helplessness over specific situations and his overwhelming desire to get a roll of honor.

From the beginning to the end, Sandhu’s narrative works both for and against his salvation. He is at once a victim and a rebel and at once a silent spectator.
Beginning with the words “I ran away.” Sandhu informs his readers about how the narrative intends to proceed. He draws upon distinct perspectives: pro and anti-Khalistan, to link together the experiences into one narrative. The images of pain, travail, ferocity come out in the way that gives way to images of solace and redemption, although temporary. In storytelling, feeling and emotions are integral parts. The words like ‘pain’, ‘rape’, and ‘sex’ suggest suffering. The emotional ups and downs of ‘self’ are depicted through the words ‘dream’ ‘fan’ and ‘eye’. The words like ‘betrayal’ signify remorse and anguish, words like ‘uniform’ ‘school’ ‘picked up’ evoke images of destruction and violence. Viewed in the context of self-construction and remembering, Appu interprets the stories of his classmates A1, Balraj, and Lalten as collectively representative of each of their individual identities.

The plot of the novel is not condensed but circular where the author goes back and forth in order to lend his own interpretation to his past. Being omnipresent throughout the novel, the author has exquisitely explained the historical-political event of Khalistan movement. He makes several discoveries after the death of Joga, his friend, with whom he had shared a very special childhood bond. The imagery of ‘blister’ signifies his inner pain. From a feeble and a non-assertive moral coward, Appu is transformed into a morally assertive, politically conscious, and a socially defiant individual.

In the first chapter, significantly titled “In the Widening Gyre”, Appu returns to the point from where he had run away twenty-five years ago. He revisits his interior, private world of personal sufferings, dilemmas, and conflicts he witnessed in the past. Negotiating through the given timeline with regards to his immediate state situation, he personally feels how he and his state were fellow sufferers. In order to tell the story of his state, Appu had to uncover his own wounds of the past and finally free himself from the chains of his past at the end of the novel. The first chapter opens in the wake of Operation Bluestar and narrates its effects on the lives of the students.

In the second chapter, “The Falcon cannot Hear the Falconer”, Appu confronts with multi-layered conflicts but he cannot figure them out. While visiting a Gurudwara in Jassab, he recalls his village Gurudwara. The novel foregrounds how cadets are influenced by the provoking words of Bhaiji, the head of the Gurudwara sahib. Some Sikh students back Bhindranwala and were ready to take up arms against the very army they once wanted to serve. Some boys sodomize their mild-mannered
classmates and juniors. Teachers do not understand why their students are disturbed. They believe only in enforcing discipline as they know it. The animosity, patriotism, religious zeal, everything is falling apart. The novel tries to draw a parallel between the internal and external conflicts of the mind and the horror inside and outside the school itself. Appu observes the way his schoolmates adopt Bhindrnawala as an overpowering idea rather than an identity annihilated by the mighty state. The innocent Sikhs who did not favor the idea of Khalistan were also seen as militants by the security personnel. In those days, the turban defined who was a militant and who was not. Children grew up not knowing how the Hindus and Sikhs were different and suddenly now their religious identities were probably the worst affected, they were prime targets for recruitments by the extremists as well as the police. A Sikh with short hair was completely lost not knowing where he belonged and if his confused identity would work for or against him. The chapter concludes with an excerpt from Appu’s personal diary:

15 August 1984

Strange day! In the same afternoon, I saw Gandhi fighting the British who ruled India before Independence and heard Bhaiji speaking against the government that now rules us. Is Bhaiji to the government of India what Gandhi was to the British? Now that is a question on logical reasoning from the NDA entrance test (62).

In the third chapter, titled ‘Things Fall Apart’ Miss Passey is introduced as a foil to the hard-hitting system of school. Sandhu has quite distinctly incorporated the poem Snake by D. H. Lawrence, in order to highlight the aspect of pettiness. Ms. Passey, the English teacher says, in reference to the poem, “That is the whole point of the poem. Actually, of any poem, or any work of art, helps you question your prejudices” (68). The pettiness, feeling small, is the core of the poem. Appu relates his position with the poet when the feeling of pettiness is consuming him. The author takes up literature to give voice to his personal oppression. Symbolically, Ms. Passey’s words reflect the author’s state of mind who personally considers, “Finding reasons for your actions. Learning what it means to be responsible. Taking responsibility for what you do, how you act” (69). By the end of the chapter, Appu informed Baba, his father, what happened between junior and senior students of the school and how the fight snatched
their senior-most status from them but he could not tell him the harsh truth and the origin of the conflict that existed between the juniors and the seniors: sodomy.

The fourth chapter “Mere Anarchy” begins with his internal fears and confusions. Balraj’s presence is disturbing Appu and it forces him to question his own loyalties. The situation turns from bad to worse with the school authorities, among batch mates, within him and all around, inside the school while bullying and domination through sodomy, threats and religious fervor and activities inclined towards violence are on a rise. The news of the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi coagulates the sectarian lines. Appu cannot understand why Sikh cadets are distributing sweets anxiously on the death of Mrs. Gandhi and on the other hand, his schizophrenic mother has been mourning Mrs. Gandhi’s death for the last three days.

In the fifth chapter “The Blood Dimmed Tide”, Appu visits A1’s home, Amritsar, during vacation as he wants to see what happened to Amritsar during the Operation Bluestar. While going to the Golden temple, Daarji, A1’s grandfather, a retired English lecturer, tells them the history of Amritsar and advises them “You should know your own stories”. Telling them the historical background of Amritsar and the Golden Temple, Daarji gives the history of ‘Ghallughara’. Daarji compares the tragedy of Jallianwala Bagh in 1919 and Operation Bluestar with each other. “In both the cases, our own people had killed each other. It was the uniform that makes the difference” (106). The chapter displays a ‘bulb dimmed’ eyes of Daarji, a witness of an era, who has seen the bloodshed tragedies - partition of India, wars with Pakistan and now, the violence of 1984. He orates that “Like all Sikhs are not terrorists, all Hindus are not frenzied mobs but 1984 will remain a shameful blot on all of us” (107). ‘Before the 1980s, anyone who knew a Sikh called him a ‘Sardaarji’. But in the eighties, Sikhs lost the ‘Ji’. Appu’s ‘wound’ keeps on festering symbolizing his agony to articulate all the dirt of communalism and politics. The novel comes back in present “In 2005, I started my trip to engage with the violence; with a visit to Ayodhya… political parties had used the ‘Ram janambhoomi- Babri Masjid conflict to win the election” (109).

Prem uncle, Joga’s father is laden with grief after Joga’s death and spends most of the time listening to Bhindranwala’s speeches. Baba doesn’t want him to get.
influenced by this movement so he makes him understand the historical-political problems of Khalistan movement. The writer has put forth the historical fact:

The farmers in Punjab were once highly regarded for the Green revolution\textsuperscript{ii}, for making Punjab the granary of India. Now, these farmers faced an acute shortage of water because the central government had diverted the waters of Bhakhranangal dam to the neighboring states, Haryana and Rajasthan. Alcoholism was a problem in Punjab: the spiraling costs of weddings had undone many families (44).

The phenomenon of justice is strongly emphasized in this chapter. The novel has given the reference of *Who are the Guilty?*\textsuperscript{iii}, a documented accounts of victims, published on 21 November 1984. During his visit to Delhi in 2005, he meets his namesake Amandeep whose father was burnt by a violent mob during the three-day pogrom in Delhi that was followed by the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi on 31st October 1984. Appu realized that first he should write his own story and pain. Only then he will be able to address others stories. He decides to grow his hair long in order to understand his religion through experience.

The next chapter, titled, “Ceremony of Innocence” indicates that Appu takes a personal and independent decision of growing his hair while Ladoo comes back from the vacation with his hair trimmed, reclaiming his Hindu identity. Multiple factors prove to be disturbing for Appu, “Joga’s corpse, the reports on the radio, …Balraj, the eye, the Gurudwara in Jassaband…Delhi, Bhindrwala and discussions with Baba and Prem Uncle (134). The memories of the past haunt him and the anxiety to achieve roll of honour has left his heart. He keeps on questioning his own confusions and dilemmas. In another instance, Appu faces the wrath of a policemen’s aggression due to his ‘Sardar’ identity. During his visit to Paarni, a policeman asks him to remove his turban and he is shocked to see the attitude of those policemen, “I was not sure what my crime was” (143). The policemen slap him, kicks him and the incident strips Appu of his innocence; he feels being divided and unable to gather himself emotionally. In this chapter, Appu becomes close to Gaurav, a boy junior to him, and they find comfort in each other’s arms. He unveils his confusion about himself and about events that made him walk several dark alleys and the virgin land of light and peace in his
own heart. He pares his anima and animus (Gourav and Ms. Passey) in front of his readers which may be cathartic for their hidden pain points and passions. The novel explicitly shows the conflict between his inner self and outer image, between his past experiences and his present action. His action has the shadow of his past guilt and regrets.

In another incident, Appu and his classmates undergo rigorous punishment. Appu is unable to infer if he is right or wrong, “which was worse than being wrong” (145). He cries less from pain and more from his helplessness. Thus he feels that being beaten is his reality and he deserves to be treated like this. That ‘eye’ of conscience did not disturb him on that particular night. Following this incident, A1 left the school as his father could not afford it and Appu is disappointed the way he left him behind. Again this incident clearly depicts how difficult it was for him to write his own story. Repeatedly, Appu’s orientations are governed by pain and suffering.

The next chapter “The Best Lack All Conviction” opens with the time when the school conducts an old boy’s meet on the New Year’s Day where Manas, from 1973 batch, a deputy superintendent in the Punjab police reveals that Balraj is a fugitive criminal who breaks the prison and is on run; and situation is not normal outside. The incident of the calf is quite symbolic in this chapter. Lalten and Akhad brought a calf and trapped it in the schoolhouse. They attempted to exploit it sexually and physically and in sheer anger, Lalten stroke his ‘kirpan’ and stabbed the calf’s neck. Viewing this heinous act, the image of Joga’s mutilated body comes in front of Appu. The novel states that “The heart is a tough beast, isn’t it? I didn’t intervene in the macabre dance of sex and violence on the poor calf that. I don’t remember what I told myself...seldom in life have I felt as wretched as I did that day” (187).

“The Worst are Full of Passionate Intensity”, the eighth chapter begins with the conversation between Appu and Balraj. Gaurav feels betrayed when Appu refuses to tell anything about Balraj as Appu wants to protect him from the knowledge of who Balraj is. Gaurav left him and labelled him ‘dishonest’. Appu fails to justify his position. The worst experience came when Akhad found Appu’s “mahroon” diary, where he concedes his pains and pleasures, and read it aloud in front of other cadets. Appu felt ashamed in front of others when other cadets hunt on his diary. He
compares this shameful act to the way Akhad and Lalten treated the calf which had to face terrible and inhumane torture. Akhad and other cadets peel out his diary and urinate on the pages. He is unable to remedy the situation and remains a helpless spectator like the calf. He has anger over his helplessness, feels being raped publicly which eventually alienates him from his own self. This is the moment when a transformation comes into his character because he has nothing to save now. “I felt open to fight. Open to take on those who had destroyed my peace of mind the whole of last year” (209). This is the turning point of the novel when Appu and his friends decide to open a war against perpetrators. “I am writing to come to terms with my past. I am writing to put together the diary I lost that day to my mates’ violence and casualness, to examine that life once again after all these years. I hope that these words become pages and the pages become a book, else once again, I would be left probing my heart and clutching empty air” (209). Symbolically, Appu connects his position of victimhood and Operation Bluestar: “What happened to Punjab during Operation Bluestar was what happened to me when they publicly tore my diary. The rape of the diary was like the army’s attack on the Golden Temple” (213).

Consequently, as shown in the novel, violence has been perpetrated at two levels: first inside the school where students are abandoned and betrayed by their own teachers, where sodomy is used as a preferred tool of exploitation and domination, where bullying is being practiced every now and then. In the second level, the readers are reminded of the unspeakable violence of 1984 and its aftermath through Balraj’s perspective, who transforms into a militant, Joga, picked up by police only because being a turbaned Sikh. Lalten loses his brother in the hands of the same vicious air of insurgency. Through these multiple narratives, Sandhu narrates the situation of Punjab’s youth in 1984 when Sikh identity is under crisis.

The representation of self and identity in this text takes place not through just one framework but many. If there is a narrative of history, there is also a narrative of personal loss, of “collective trauma”, and also of time and timelessness, “form and formless”. Moving beyond history and time, the narrative also reveals violence as the essence of communalism which further oppresses not only religion and classes but masses and alters their existence/identity. “Earlier the conflict was between the self and the class, now it went deeper. I realized that I had no self” (183). From an innocent, confused and weak-willed person, Appu transforms into a socially defiant
and a politically enlightened individual. Being physically weak and fragile, and traumatized by his own past and subsequent repression of grief, he transforms as a man of reason and substance who wants to fight back, wants to tell his “story” to the world outside, wants to look back and throw light on form and formless aspects of his life. He discerns his inner self and gradually finds an outlet in the act of writing.

In the final chapter, words emerge as a powerful entity. The words grant him liberation from the shackles of his past fears. The author’s purpose is to make his readers aware of the way violence exists and is exercised in our society both at an individual and at the state level. Time constantly swings back and forth, and so does the pendulum of past and present of Appu. Symbolically, the act of writing not only unites his past and present but also yokes together his shattered fragmented self. The novel ends very differently from how it had begun. Trauma is what starts the novel and ends with a release from it. Writing gives him that space—“It is a space where the free birds come to feed every morning” (237). The novel ends with the imagery of birds that indicates reconciliation, maybe the reconciliation of the author’s mind.

Traumatic memories and the ferocity of time are depicted through obscene words, crass profanity, through which the writer has articulated how both the sides—the police and the separatists—had pulled the gun on each other. In a way, the experience of those atrocities had split the protagonist's loyalties between the Sikh community and the Indian nation. The disturbing sexual assaults, perpetrated by the senior boys of the military school against the younger students, illustrate how the violence within Indian society seeped into the everyday lives of its people despite being physically distant from the sites of greatest mob activity. Many of Appu’s classmates are Sikhs but even the non-Sikhs are upset. Students like Akhad and Lalten, openly express support for Khalistan and some even join the movement. Balraj, who was supposed to join the NDA, has become a militant. Appu no longer feels so proud of studying in an army school, when the Indian army is seen as the enemy of the Sikh community. Many of Appu’s Sikh friends like Lalten and Akhad were no longer keen to make it to the “roll of honour”, that is, join the NDA. Appu feels attracted to the persona of Bhindrawala, Lalten had created.

The novel discusses how bullying works and trickles down from the nation state and to the community. It examines its manifestations in the relationship between
the senior and junior students in a closed system, between the strong and the weak and finally how the weak fight back when the cloak of secrecy of the armed world order is taken down. Sodomy and Operation Bluestar are actually linked. Sodomy is an attack by a man on a man at a place where the victim can’t defend himself. In the context of Operation Bluestar, religion is involved; it was an attack by a male force, which is the Indian Army, on a male force, which is what the Sikhs had been told they are as a martial race, at a place where the Sikhs could not defend themselves. As the story navigates from Operation Bluestar to the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the resulting anti-Sikh riots, the students at the military school attempt to make sense of the events. Appu comes to the realization that he is a member of an oppressed minority, and it causes him to question his place as a Sikh and future soldier of India: “How would I fight for a country when my people were not sure we belonged to it?” (122).

Lalten, over the vacation, grows a thin beard which makes him look older than his age. During initial years at school, he had been Appu’s friend, always ready with funny stories and jokes and now he has joined Khalistan commando force. His rage and torment can be identified through his words: “The police had picked up my brother and we Sikhs have to fight for justice” (15). After vacation, Latlen becomes an amritdhari Sikh (amrit is the holy nectar partaken by those Sikhs who commit themselves to the brotherhood.) Akhad says “we will have our names on a different roll of honour. Khalistan’s roll of honour… had the best weapons and had been preparing for a battle for long. Even Latlen speaks in an extreme rage “you wait and watch. I will become a martyr. Make my life worthy” (38).

While denoting the ferocities of 1984 Punjab, the novel questions authoritative power. It dwells on different identities an individual takes in different phases of life on the basis of color, religion, community, language, and nation. Appu really doesn’t belong anywhere, both in terms of religion and nation. He is called a ‘Mona’ and considered less Sikh by those who have grown their hair. When he grows his hair, he is seen as less Indian by the police. In school, he receives some importance as the in-charge of his class, but does not belong either with the victims or the bullies. For Sandhu, ‘nations are imagined realities, so are communities, so are religions’. And
that’s what Appu symbolizes. The narrative is lucid and casts on the readers’ minds vivid images of violence being perpetrated at the surface and subterranean levels. As a real person, he has his questions, he has his faults and he is constantly looking for answers.

The novel has brought back many memories of the 1980s, the violence that the public saw and read in the newspapers. People were also confused about how to react to the idea of Khalistan. Not only youngsters but old age people like Daarji, Nanaji are dismayed at the times they had been going through. It is not only about the dilemma that the idea of reason poses. The focus is on bullying, where the victim and the perpetrator are trapped in a cynical relationship, fueled by fear of the unknown. Throughout there’s a lurking shadow of the threat of violence in its most humiliating form. Sandhu explains: “I am not writing this story to talk about the mere loss of status from senior to not senior. That is just the cover, the peg. This is really about something else. It is a story about invasion and loss”(78). This metaphor of “invasion and loss” extends to the demolition of the Golden Temple as well. Consequently, Operation Bluestar is compared to an act of sodomy by a person in power against someone younger, vulnerable and under the care of the perpetrator. Sandhu draws a strong parallel between the obscene events of the military school and the obscenity with which the dark days of terrorism destroyed numerous lives.

Though Sandhu’s narration of events is dominated by personal memory, it is equally constructed through collective and cultural memories. The trauma of the disastrous period and its terrible aftermath is represented through the ‘eye’ of an adult Sikh boy who witnesses and experiences the violence of those times. His narrative is supported by multidimensional memories of state records and news. There is another space that lies between the personal and collective memories. This space is imagination/fiction. A significant point is that one can never recall each and every incident yet can never forget those few scars. As Elizabeth Jelin says, “Memory is not an object that is simply there to be extracted, but rather it is produced by active subjects that share a culture and an ethos” (68). Therefore, memory is not just a part but it constitutes the whole framework of collective trauma shared by the community. According to Alison Landsberg “memory is not a transhistorical phenomenon” but it is “historically and culturally specific; it has meant different things to people and
cultures at different times and has been instrumentalized in the service of diverse cultural practices (Prosthetic Memory 3).

This novel expresses the author’s experience, confusion, understanding, perception, and observations. These expressions are explained strikingly through the use of evocative and pictorial references for the most part. Each scene is brought alive for the readers through meticulous descriptions. Readers can almost see, imagine, and hear what Appu has been experiencing at each event described in the narrative. Appu’s blister had burst and he is asking A1 “How bad was the attack on the Golden Temple?” A1 informs in the book:

Many more were killed. Amritsar burned for more than two weeks. It is still burning… the terrorists extorted money from people in my locality and assured us protection. We were accustomed to sleep with the deafening sounds of the grenades and bullet firing. It was the anniversary of Guru Arjun Dev’s martyrdom. Thousands of pilgrims died, Appu. Many died. Many were wounded. We did not believe that the Indian army could have attacked and captured the Golden temple. Yet, it all happened, and we saw it (41).

The senior-junior student tussle becomes a metaphor for the conflict outside. At the state level, the Indian army becomes a foe, is dreaded and deplored by the Sikh community. Sodomy becomes a metaphor for Operation Bluestar, in either case, the violation of honor occurs. There is a palpable sense of anger and a feeling of injustice. The age-old system, where seniors controlled, guided, and punished, juniors is disbanded on account of the fight that took place just outside the school broke up between Appu’s batch and one immediate senior to them. Appu and his classmates put up with harsh punishment inflicted on them by their seniors, which usually involved a mix of sodomy and corporal punishment. Sikh students like Akhad and Lalten relate the events of school with what Indian state did to Sikhs. In Lalten’s words “everything has crashed around us, but these bastards…they live in their trenches. They will never admit it” (47). Nationalism, friendship, and betrayal become convoluted concepts for Appu.

Baba’s friends had hoped that Appu would keep alive the family tradition by joining the Indian army. But now they consider him as a traitor as he is studying in an institute which is part of Indian army responsible for trashing the holy place of Sikhs.
This change in attitude reflects the dynamic nature of identity, an individual embraces during different phases of life on the basis of color, religion, community, language, and nation. For example, during an inter-school football match, students were made to support opposite teams against their will just because it was ordered by the school authority. The agony of the author upon seeing this touch of hypocrisy is rendered when he says “I realised with time that we are all potential chameleons changing our colours according to where we belong, who plays us, what keeps us safe” (219).

Even where radical change occurs, for instance in a character or in values, such a change has to be accounted for in the narrative, in terms of transformation from an ‘earlier’ to a ‘later’. Nevertheless, we all have some sense that while our memories are shared and to a great extent intersubjectively constituted, there is something special about the ones we call our own, something that they impart which is qualitatively vital to our sense of ourselves and hold significant meaning in our lives. This, of course, only applies to a conscious recall through which certain past experiences are recapitulated and reassessed in a particular set of present circumstances. As such, the act of remembering involves a complex, mutually shaping mixture of what is private to oneself and what is shared with others. Aspects of inner experience such as personal secrets, undisclosed preoccupations, intimate feelings are not split off from the world of encounter and relations with others in which remembering is a mundane occurrence. It is defined and given identity as a consequence of situated forms of social interaction, belonging, and communicative exchange. As with subjectivity more generally, the subjectivity of the person remembering is associated with cognitive, performative and cultural elements of symbolic activity, and involves the coexistence of coercion and freedom, inheritance and critique.

Memory is regarded as an elusive tool by psychologists and historians as it is subjective in nature and is vulnerable to external mediations. However, the traumatizing memory in the aforementioned text is not an individual's personal matter but an integral part of the social and collective memory. Although this novel is a semi-autobiographical writing, the writer had to rely on collective and cultural memories. Sandhu was four years old when his mother was diagnosed with schizophrenia. He was six when his father decided to send him to a military boarding school in Punjab to protect him from his mother and he was ten when the Indian
military attacked the Golden Temple. During the genocide of the Sikhs after Indira Gandhi’s assassination in 1984, for three weeks he did not know if his parents were still alive.

There is a fine line between a fictionalized autobiography or memoir and autobiographical fiction. Fictionalized autobiographies are mostly a truthful telling of the author’s experience with sections fictionalized to “protect the innocent”, filling gaps where memory fails, and occasionally re-arranging events for achieving a more readable account and accept it as truth. On the other hand, autobiographical fiction is primarily comprised of made-up events and characters that may be based on the author’s own experience and self. The protagonist might be modeled after the author and do at least some of the things the author has actually done in his or her life. However, the ratio of truth to fiction is usually somewhat small.

Semi-autobiographical writing pertaining to or being a work of fiction is generally strongly influenced by events in an author’s life. The reader’s fallacy here is, however, to assume that everything an author writes about their alter-ego is true about them as a person, when in the fact you have to assume the opposite. Appu remains acutely conscious of his biographical association with the Sikhs and his own somewhat troubled childhood with the sinister memory of 1984 looming large in the backdrop. Consequently, his partial identification with his classmates during the troubled past can be read as a throwback signifier of his own troubled past. The quest by a survivor for his missing past results in an intriguing mixture of disparate voices and equivocal “facts” that only emphasizes the radical inaccessibility of the past. Interestingly, enough, this lack of closure on the level of historiography is accompanied by the author’s impressive ethical openness to, and empathy for, what may (or may not) be the trauma of the radically Other. Sandhu’s novel, by and large, exercises the multiplicity of voices, the temporal layering, and the ambiguous status of historical events to arrive at a univocal narrative bent on closure.

These dynamics are not, in themselves, popular memory. They are the continuous operation of popular remembrance. Its entire mnemonic meaning is generated from what constitutes popular memory as a product of remembering in common. This is not held in the texts, nor is it held by individuals, it is in the discursive space between them that popular memo exists, energized by the action of...
the mnemonic imagination. Popular memory operates through a discursive space in which we remember in common using cultural resources in two senses: the conventional systems of meaning which structure the ways in which we communicate our pasts and the symbolic resources which represent the second-hand experience of others. Within this discursive space, it is the mnemonic imagination which enables us to recognize and reconcile the past of the other and to situate our own pasts in relation to theirs. Popular memory is then the interspace of dialogue activated by the mnemonic imagination, between the three objects of memory identified by Ricoeur: ourselves, our close relations, and distant others.

Sandhu is not only sharing his personal story but also intentionally highlighting cultural trauma and collective memories. Almost all of the memories are influenced and tampered by emotions at the times of the events and later by the aftermath of those events. Sometimes these memories are prosthetic in nature yet they cannot be held as bogus since they have an indelible and practical impact on the life of the person even though they lack historical accuracy. An important aspect of the process of bearing memory as a testimony is witnessing to the events as well as to the memories of the victims. In their seminal book *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Felman and Laub have placed witnessing traumatic memories on three levels: “the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself” (75).

There is no denying the fact that memory is never pure or unmediated. The culture and community have a great impact on the individual remembrance; who remembers and what is remembered can never be separated from the collective memory. Therefore there is always a question mark on the idea of truthfulness and reliability in memory. The elusive memory may tamper with the historical truth but the fact should not be forgotten that the survivor’s account is empirical and not factual. The agents of social system that are supposed to be its preservers ironically become its destroyers. In school, the teachers who are supposed to be the guiding stars for students become the tyrant. Sandhu tends to put forth this dialectical hinge between ‘victim and perpetrator’. The position of victimhood encourages and makes him come to terms with writing his story.
Apart from his personal experience, Sandhu has vividly exposed the social, historical and political impulse of those times and later returned, invariably, to his own personal memory of loss and invasion. In the historical context, the novel emphasizes the past in the way it explores the connections between past and present. Sandhu gives facts and interpretations through different characters. Daarji is one such character whom Sandhu has used as a medium of information pertaining to the history of Amritsar and historical events like the “ghallughara” or Holocaust and the Jallialalah Bagh massacre. It is through the character of ‘Nanaji’ that Appu comes to know the pre-independence history of Sikhs and their contribution in 1857 and how Sikhs received the status of the ‘martial race’. Later, in the middle of the novel, Baba, Appu’s father told him about the Khalistan movement and the consequences of the Operation Bluestar. Interestingly, Daarji and Naanaji have also witnessed the 1947 partition and call it ‘second tragedy in Indian history’. Sandhu gives a picture of minor characters to develop the plot. When Naanaji hears about Operation Bluestar, his past memories come back and he fears for his family’s life. Appu sees his Naanaji crying while listening to the news about Operation Bluestar and calling it a “ghallughara”.

The aspects of silence and speech, pain and healing, memory and forgetting are at the heart of this novel. The act of writing compelled him to re-examine his role, his reaction at the death of Joga and the violence he faced in Delhi. Silence on the part of the victims/students is dealt with in detail in this novel. As per socio-cultural findings sometimes the victims refuse to speak about their experience and even try to suppress their memories in order to go on with their lives. But other times their silence is thrust upon them so that they may not bring out the hidden truth behind the events. Sandhu recalls his visit to Trilokpuri where survivors are not ready to tell their tale of woes. They did not want to remember the riots and did not want to relive those harrowing times.

The novel can, in fact, be viewed from different angles. It can be seen as a personal narrative of Sandhu who has witnessed the turbulent times of 1984. The narrative can also be seen as a healing process. He writes “My attempts to write this story is an attempt to un-name it, flesh it out, maybe finally see it bound in the cover pages of a book” (30). As is evident from the analysis of the novel, Sandhu as the author employs three significant devices: memory, trauma, and remembrance. The
imaginative recollection starts when Sandhu himself experiences the brutal face of terrorism at both personal as well as the state level. Here, the personal is the political and all politics is about human beings. So human beings must give their account of politics. Memory comes from seeing things crumbling in front of you. Telling the tale is coming to terms with the enormity of the event. It is about remembering, reclaiming, and resolving. Sandhu writes “Writing those notes let me to reclaim my own self, recognise the binary of the victim and bullying, the form and formless and resolve my own confessions” (196). The endeavor to write of those traumatized experiences leads him to an understanding of his own confusions as well as his own community’s alienation, as a terrorist and victim, from the rest of the nation his own community has rebelled against.

In this regard, Susan J. Brison, in the context of the Collective Trauma, proposes that when dealing with human-inflicted trauma, the narrativity of trauma is an important step in shifting from being an object of the perpetrator’s speech narrative into being a subject of one’s own narrative. This according to Brison helps the trauma survivor to overcome their traumatic experience. Brison particularly refers to human-inflicted trauma and acts of violence. “The act of bearing witness to the trauma facilitates this shift, not only by transforming a traumatic memory into a community but also by re-establishing connections essential to selfhood” (40). Brison clearly addresses the issue of limitation of the speech and language for translating trauma and discusses the importance of the listener’s willingness to understand the traumatic narrative, since the narrator’s experience is virtually ‘unrepresentable’ within the norms of linguistics (9).

The Operation Bluestar has been a collective trauma, and, as is often the case with memory, the recollection of those traumatic experiences takes place collectively. Therefore, memory not only takes place in the cultural or personal domain but also in the social as it can only be recollected to others and can only have meaning within a particular social group. This reconstruction of memory involves the rewriting of history since the war had to be realigned with the revised memory. As Cathy Caruth has argued, the concept of trauma allows us “to recognize the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential” (11). In essence, the concept of trauma offers a “powerful alternative to notions of history (and memory) that presume the existence of a single ‘true’ and ‘factual’ past that, with enough effort, can be made to
reappear in the present” (Turner xxi). Frederic Jameson has said that “history is what hurts; it is what refuses desire and sets inorable limits to the individual as well as collective prais” (102). In this sense, collective cultural traumas are historical emerging out of a conflation of individual or personal stories.

The narrative pattern only appears as we look back and are able to gain some perspective on what has previously transpired, for events to become meaningful rather than being instantly meaningful at the moment of their occurrence. It is as a result of such a pattern that we can then recognize experience and what is made of it as characterizing the individual subject and conditioning what, and maybe how, she or he remembers. Remembering is, in this respect, the “experience of experiences”. As Keightley opines that the main implication of memory conceived as a changing patchwork is that the subject remembered by the remembering subject alters and shifts from one period of his life to another, along with the meanings and values of autobiographical memories in their more varied and complete ensemble. Consequently, the remembering subject is different from the self by whom the memory was formed, while that memory itself has no fixed form, however, precise and vivid it may seem at any specific moment of recollection. Even the most vivid memory may change in its meaning for you at different junctures of your life. The remembering subject is also different again from the self that is subsequently remembered in association with any particular memory. It is because of these continual shifts and alterations over time that memory is always in apprenticeship to experience, and the past is subject to a continually provisional process of reconstruction. Reconstruction of the past varies in its extensiveness but it never confers the finality of their findings.

In a continually mobile pattern, some memories endure, some have only a midterm span and others attain no secure or sediment position at all. The changes may in some ways be small or even imperceptible, but nothing remains wholly static and no bedrock of memory exists as some permanent or an enduring ontological base for what is either mutable or ephemeral to pass over it. For these and other reasons, there can be no single, unitary self to which remembering relates: just as self-conception and self-understanding always relate in various ways to place and historical period, so also within the span of a single lifetime are they inseparable from where we are and
what we do during specific periods of our lives. Yet it is despite, or rather, some semblance of relatedness, if not cohesion, in how we remember ourselves across different periods of our lives and across the variations of our experience- necessarily because without this any conception of selfhood would be, if not possible, then certainly on shaky ground. “If we cannot attain such relatedness over time, in stories of the self or development of the self, we may feel that the value of our experience and how we stand by it is somehow under threat” (Keightley and Pickering 21).

One of the most common ways of considering an experience in a temporal light is through the distinction between assimilated experience referring to the knowledge that is crystalized out of a previous experience, and experience that is lived in any particular, contingent moment. A lived experience refers to a subject’s immersion in the flow of action and interaction with others, and to our immediate observation of and feelings about the various encounters and situations we find ourselves in, from hour to hour, day to day, week to week. While we are so immersed, the meanings of events, encounters, and episodes may be relatively inchoate, not yet realized in any developed manner that can be firmly carried ahead into the unfolding future, across the changing years of our lives.

This is what is meant when one says that what happens to us becomes meaningful over time as we develop and gain a more durable sense of its significance. It is through this sort of process that we are able to distinguish between lived experiences and what subsequently ensues when a particular experience or set of experiences is delineated in memory and certain associations and values are attached or reassigned to them by the remembering subject. The meanings of experience and the definite values derived from them are more fully constructed and considered than they were at the time any particular experience occurred. “As experience has been worked up in memory and reflected upon, at different stages in our lives, it then develops a cumulative quality as layer upon changing layer of experience in our memory acquires an increasing sense of their aggregated significance across different times in our lives. In that sense, for better or for worse, we understand ourselves in the present because of the past” (Keightley and Pickering 26). Although immediate experience may not be immediately understood, it is always understood in the light of previous experiences, especially in relation to what is familiar, routine, and ordinary.
‘Immediate and mediated dimensions’ of experience remain in play with each other and it is the sense of their interplay which characterizes their temporal relation. The basis of this transactional relationship occurs in the field of memory as it becomes “temporally constituted”.

The distinction made by the adjectival addition between these dimensions of experience is accomplished in German by the two distinct terms “ein erlebnis” (something you experience, like an event) and “erfahrung” (experience in terms of knowledge or expertise) where the former refers to immediate experience at the moment it is lived, and the latter to the point where experience is evaluated and the process through which we learn from accumulated experience in our biographical journey. The contrast is between a moment in time and movement across time, with the movement involving the cumulative quality of crystallized knowledge. So what we take from the past when we remember remains unsure in status and ambivalent in meaning. The quest and sense of experience are inapplicable to the remembering subject, for in remembering there are no unwavering rules of observation, enquiry, and proof that can be relied upon and followed. Memory is always selective but it nevertheless embraces all kinds of encounter and all kinds of experiences. That is why we must relate remembering to both of these broad forms of experience, erlebnis and erfahrung. Lived experiences provide the raw material from which a mature appraisal and understanding is ultimately achieved: the mediated experience that is erfahrung in its biological sense. Bildungsroman is the kind of literary genre of western modernity, centred around the problem of self-formation and the relationship of self and social structure, with a particular focus on the negotiation or struggle between the project of individuation and the demands of social institutions and conventions.

In a sort of experiment with one’s self, the episode becomes an experience if the individual manages to give it a meaning that “expands and strengthens his personality. Yet why it is memorable and why it is significant continues to be interpretatively mobile, in a creative process that involves each successive expansion and retelling of it mediating the next” (Keightley and Pickering 29). Events leading to disruption and change are more likely to be etched in the memory than those which are integral to an established practice. Their significance in recollection has to be considered in terms of both their disruptive effect and the eventual resumption of the
more settled pattern, for memory is as much a dialectic continuity and discontinuity as is the reworking of what is uncaptured or new into the pattern that has been interrupted congealed in memory as the product of experience (30). Remembering is an active process of drawing on that product within a changed temporal situation and is an element of lived experience in the present.

Moreover, through its dialectic of continuity and discontinuity, inclusive of its past and forward-looking dimensions, experience links up memory as a product with remembering as a process. Our experience is both derived from what happens to us directly, in situated occurrences and encounters, and from what we take from a broad range of cultural materials outside of the local, everyday life, including those of the media and internet as well as more traditional cultural forms like novel, dramas or biographies. Experience is a great source of self-consciousness, the confrontation of self with diverse others. Experience as a reservoir of resources for self-identity may involve us in contradictory meanings and conflicting discourses, as well as in what is unexpected, uncertain, and new. A narrative helps us select form, structure and coordinate our experience into temporal coherence and so give shape to our aspiring, inwardly developing selves. In acting as our own biographers, patterning our experience through the narrative is central to the experience of remembering.

In the relationship between experience and memory we distinguish between the experience that is being remembered and the experience of remembering. “experience, as it is remembered, corresponds to memory as the product resulting from the process of remembering, while the experience of remembering is always in some sense part of the flow of immediate experience in the present. An experienced present is not one which starts and finishes in the snap of an instant. Phenomenologically, we live through and apprehend an event— a conversation, an incident in the street, a film which we watch at the cinema— as a sequenced ensemble, with its own particular durational unfolding and its own particular temporal direction within this unfolding. In this way we distinguish between ‘before’ and ‘after’ within an event, but not as a separate stage. In an experience, they are felt and apprehended through their interconnectedness. The athlete runs, and we witness the race. The musician plays a chord, and as this is combined with other chords, in a dynamically interconnected movement, we hear the tune as a whole, a coherent succession of sonic
elements that we apprehend as a melody. We illustrate these analogies in order to illustrate the rhythmic flow running through and running together the various components of an experienced present. Lived experience in this sense is not represented, for it is only when it becomes identifiable as a past, as no longer lived in that immediate flow and tempo, that it can then be represented within a succeeding present. Memory as a product of past experience is a representation in this sense, whereas remembering is an experienced process lived within a particular moment.

Sandhu explicitly compares Operation Bluestar and the act of sodomy. The last chapter of the book completes the circle of multiple stories, stories within stories; events within events. Expressions like “I was uneasy, my mind was on fire” reflect his trauma and the hallucinations he has been experiencing for the last two decades. He cannot figure out the problems and fears he has in his mind when he says, “The not knowing was a fear in itself: like the barrel of the gun that pointed at me that dark night in the fields. I sought to know the unknown” (226). The first step of writing begins but articulation does not come easily to the author or the protagonist. He compares his state of mind with his schizophrenic mother. Appu defines how difficult it was for him to tell the truth, “I never felt satisfied with what I had written” (72). He starts forgetting and feels fragmented. His mother’s psychiatrist advises him to continue writing. He said, “It will break you. Then build you” (230). Sandhu makes a powerful case for the need to articulate the tales of trauma to survive.

The events, the characters, the timeline, and the spaces in this novel are plotted variously on the matrix of reality but the essences are real. For him, the act of writing is the way to search the truth and writing this novel was a healing experience. However, the events of 1984 bring many unforeseen alterations in his life. The novel is a reflection of his experience the way he lost his honor, the way he was humiliated by his seniors and the way teachers betrayed him and his expectations. In the end, the novel comes back to the present time, and finally, he meets A1 after years and their association and poignant struggles together are intimately and delicately manifested through their hugs… A1 read out the excerpts of the book from where he left the school. A1 considers that “No perspective is bigger than your imagination” (236). Appu recalls his Baba’s words “In the beginning of your life, you have faced a
challenge. Will you run away or face it”. By the end, he stands against his fears, confusions, and dilemmas and creates a space for himself.

The way this is experienced as a lived process and then subsequently assimilated as the product of experience and memory through an interpretation of why it was new, why it emerged, why it was different to what went before. A past never was in the form in which it appears as past. Its reality is in its interpretation and its integration into the present. Any gain in experience involves a repossession of the past (quoted Emerson 33). “The experience of remembering, therefore, hinges around not only the temporal passage from the past to the present time, in which the remembering occurs, but also the temporal distinction between lived experiences and in its present-centeredness and assimilated experience” in its orientation within any particular present time to what is being remembered from the past (Keightley and Pickering 34).

In this manner, memory is a vital component in making sense of the past experience but with the past experience only being used for this task as it is continuously reinterpreted and repossessed in successive present durations. It is this which makes the experience meaningful in the long term, in a cumulative yet shifting pattern which involves shaping particular experiences into stories, and at various stages in one’s life, reassessing the significance of those stories for a temporally extended self. In this sense, the experience is made and remade as memory in a developing process circumscribed only by the limits of human finitude. The mediation of remembered experience, especially a traumatic experience, by a narrative has been widely recognized in philosophy, sociology, and cultural theory as well as the psychology of memory. Turning experience into stories of one kind or another is central to making sense of what happens to us, and to help us remember particular incidents and episodes in our lives, especially as we grow older and our experience progressively becomes a represented (verbal or artistic) narrative.

The book itself shows a strong connection between the writer’s experience and memory as Maurice Halbwach states that an “individual’s memory is the intersection of collective influences from that of the conventions of the family to the norms of the culture to which the individual belongs. Sandhu’s embedding of the traumatic personal and collective witnessing of the events in the testimonial mode constitutes
the basis of the novel’s exploration of memory’s nature and uses in the national discourse. The novel contains different stories and official records of BBC to the events that happened after Operation Bluestar and after the 31 October 1984.

Here memory is the product of experience, but in the remembering process, ‘the recall is not total, the chronicle is not without lacunae. The fragmentary character of memory obviously compromises to some extent the order of succession inherent within it, and makes the remembering subject an ‘interrupted subject’. Then how is it that our conception of memory in relation to our life-narrative does not share these features of fragmentation and interruption? To ask this is not to suggest that sequencing and order do not exist in our memory, for clearly, we rely on these features in even the most routine forms of mundane remembering, and without them, no one would be a reliable witness to anything. Moreover, memory is a matter of both chronology and intensity of experiences and is remembered per the individual’s prerogative to prioritize chronology over intensity or vice-versa.

This commemorative process questions the way memory brings coherence to experience, and it requires a further distinction between routine remembering and the actively concerted process of recollection. Actively concerted recollection occurs when storytelling builds creatively on the order of sequence inherent in memory, despite its lacunae and points of disjunction, for in storytelling the story is never simply the tedious and unilluminating recital of the chronicle of memory itself. It is only through the act of recollection that experience becomes illuminated (35). A narrative is a form in which the relation between these distinct modalities is conjoined, whether this consists of significant personal stories or stories with a broader cultural resonance. However, unlike the anticipated future, which is indeterminate, the remembered past is determinate, a chronicle that the author can radically reinterpret but cannot reverse or displace: what is done cannot be undone.

As the presence of multiple second-hand experiences does not in itself constitute the public memory, the social locations and frames of meaning specific to remembering practices are always implicated in the ways in which mediated second-hand experiences are imagined. To enter into the realm of popular memory these second-hand experiences must be imaginatively taken up in the ongoing dialogues between the self and the other which constitute this space. This, in part, refers to the
widely ignored issue of the reception of mediated representations of the past, an awareness of which is precisely what steers us away from the reified notion of a collective memory: As Ricoeur noted that “it was in the personal act of recollection that the mark of the social was initially sought found”, and it is in the discursive action of individual remembering that remembering in common is performed. Imagining the pasts of others in acts of reception is at the heart of the creative potential of popular memory as a temporal network of self-other relations, for it is within the frames of these interrelated pasts that future action is established. Of course, as we have already suggested, the presence of the past of the other in public discourse does not guarantee that we will act creatively or ethically on the basis of the imagined past of another or others.

The action of the mnemonic imagination is one of synthesis, enriching reimagining, and negotiation. When we find our own past implicated in the suffering of another, our narrative identity is radically reconstructed through a creative reinterpretation of our own first-hand experience in order to incorporate the imagined past of the other. Does this then provide the grounds for an ongoing ethically sound relation with the memories in the future? Or on a routine basis, do we selectively refuse to imagine the pasts of others where they disrupt our own narrative pattern of memories and the meanings we have attributed to our experiences? The answer is, of course, context-dependent and individual-intended, and neither of the outcomes are guaranteed.

Notes
i The term emerges from the insufficiencies of the phrases such as cultural memory and collective memory. Also See Collective Memory: The Two Cultures (1999)
ii Apart from Murray Leaf, and Gill and Singhal, there are two other scholars who link violence in Punjab with the ill-effects of the Green Revolution. Shiva (1992), commenting on the dynamics and consequences of the Green Revolution, argues that the adoption of new technology in agriculture was aimed at engineering ‘not just seeds but social relations as well’ Separatist violence emerged as one of the biggest source of human rights violations in Punjab.
iii Report of a joint inquiry into the causes and impact of the riots in Delhi from 31 October to 10 November 1984 by People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) and people's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) in the course of investigations from November 1 to November 10 1984.