

Fiction of Mitter Sain Meet
- A critique of bourgeois state
(Criticism)

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INTRODUCTION

It is a matter of great privilege and pride for me to introduce the fictional works of Mitter Sain Meet to the readers of English fiction. With the publication of his third novel "Tafteesh" (Investigation) in 1990 he at once came to limelight. Three editions of the novel published within a very short period are a testimony of his popularity in Punjabi circle. A number of seminars were organized to evaluate the art of his fiction and almost every participant appreciated his works. A book of critical appreciation about this Novel was edited by Dr.Sukhdev Khara and the novel was prescribed for M.A. (Punjabi).

Katehra (The Dock) and Sudhar Ghar (The Reform House) the second and third parts of the trilogy, too, were applauded with no exception. Later, books of critical appreciation, about these novels too were published. These works were also included in the syllabus of M.A. (Punjabi) classes.

These novels deal with the issue of "Law and Justice" in a pungent satirical tone and bring out the real picture of the phenomenon. The novelist has a first hand experience of the character and conduct of the police, judiciary and jail. The reality was fictionalized in a way that Tafteesh (Investigation) becomes investigation of the Police, Judiciary becomes the culprit in Katehra and Sudhar Ghar comes out to be a Spoiling House.

This trilogy has also been published in Hindi by Haryana Police Academy and prescribed as a book of syllabus for the police recruits. The trilogy has been translated by a renewed journalist Sh. Arjun Sharma.

His novel "Kaurav Sabha" symbolizes the corrupt character of the modern bourgeois state. The novel derives its name from the epic Mahabharata in which the greedy, lustful and inhuman nature of the State of Kauravas has been described objectivity in a vivid and lucid manner.

As the State has been the most powerful instrument in the hands of owning classes throughout the history of mankind, the modern State, too, is a tool in the hands of capitalists of the whole world. It works in favour of the owners through it claims to be a

democratic republic. Meet's other works, too, lay emphasis on the various organs of the State, that distort the law so much that lawlessness prevails in the garb of law, thereby proving the novelist's notion that "Law is the slave of the rich". The writer builds a revolutionary movement of the exploited and down trodden in the form of Lok Sangharsh Samiti. It ends with an optimistic global note that the collective, conscious and constant organization of the people must win in the future.

I hope that the English reader will also welcome his work along with Punjabi and Hindi readers.

Dr.T.R.

Chapter-1

The Beginning

It was in the year of 1971 that the first novel *Agg de Veej* (Seed of fire) of Mitter Sain Meet was published by Sahit Kender (later as Balraj Sahni Yaadgar Parkashan) Amritsar. The story of the novel revolves around the ill fate of a son of a poor peasant named Kartar and is told by an omniscient narrator (the author himself) in the traditional mode of linear narration.

On the basis of the ownership of the means of production the population of today's world is compared of three broad groups – non - working owners, owning workers and non-owning workers. Kartar's father is a poor peasant who has inherited a meager piece of land measuring only three Kilas(acres). Thus he falls into the second category of the three groups mentioned above. He works day and night to earn his livelihood from this small piece of land but cannot earn enough for that. So he pins all his hopes on his son who is studying. In the process he not only loses his health but is also constrained it sells two kilas of land also to a middle peasant of his own Village, thereby losing his social prestige. That makes him a mental wreck and he meets an untimely death.

The tragic end of the life of the poor peasant is described by the author through the grief stricken heart of his son.

“When Kartar came back to his Village after completing his M.A., he did not feel happy. The desire of his father was fulfilled, but he was already dead. Hard work and poor diet had swallowed him. All what Kartar had desired had come to an end and he wandering around aimlessly, like a mad man (Page-4).

But Kartar's misfortune proved more severe, when he entered the market with his hard earned post - graduate degree. Unemployment haunted him. He received interview letters many a time, but he could not get a job. Once he makes a request to one of the influential persons of his Village to recommend his name to the officer concerned. But

the person who had amassed a lot of wealth through his corrupt practices and had risen from the position of very small peasant to that of 'Sardar' (dominant person) in the Village, demanded five thousand rupees for recommending his name. Kartar had no means to raise that amount, except by selling the remaining one Killa of his land. That was a very agonizing situation and he had to pass through a lot of mental tension. The novelist describes this grim state of his mind in Chapter Sixth of the novel from so many angles. If he disposed of the remaining piece of land, he would lose his social status and the villagers would laugh at him; his emotional attachment with the personal property would suffer and the soul of his dead father would never forgive him. But if he does not sell it, he will not be able to bribe the Sardar and he will not get the job. His future will be dark and he will not be able to run the house. At last he is constrained to sell the land and with that money in his pocket he meets his benefactor, of course with a very heavy heart.

The novelist reveals the dismal reality of the Capital development of free India through one of the above mentioned concrete events of the life of Kartar, the central character of the novel. Free India has been following the capitalist path of development in an age of imperialism and under its 'benevolent' patronage that has proved a total failure in many respects. In absolute terms India could not achieve what it needed and what was achievable. On the other hand, relatively speaking, whatever it produced was shared by the Indian ruling class in alliance with global imperialism. Thus India's natural and human resources were exploited by a very small segment of native bourgeoisie as well as the foreign population. This situation divided the natives into two opposite camps-the rich and the poor. When K.N. Raj names India to be a 'twin nation, or Dr. Anup Singh divided it into 'India Versus Bharat' or Prof. Randhir Singh characterized it to be a nation in which 'the successful have seceded from the unsuccessful', they are formulating the above mentioned gap perpetually widening amongst the people. Meet has experienced it in his own life and voiced it in the novel through the miserable plight of Kartar's father who had to sell two Kilas of his hereditary land for providing education to his son and remaining one kila of land had to be sold by Kartar himself in order to grease the palm of his so called benefactor who from a very humble position climbed to the status of

‘Sardar’, through all the corrupt means at his disposal ignoring all the social, moral or legal norms.

This time Kartar hoped to get the job of a lecturer in History in a girl’s college because he had already paid the price. But there were two other candidates who appeared for the same post. One of the candidates was a young and qualified but poor girl, Paramjit, who had been constrained to sell her body to meet the expenditure of her mother and sisters. She used her body again to get the job and spent two nights with the chief of the college.

The irony, however, is that neither the sale of the land by Kartar nor the submission to sexual exploitation by Paramjit could bear any fruit. A third candidate was selected because he paid Rs.10, 000/- for the job.

This episode sheds light on one of the major traits of capitalist development (rather underdevelopment). In the capitalist mode of production working people are employed in productive and unproductive sectors of the economy in order to earn surplus value and keep the people under their cultural domination of the owners of the means of production. But, it also needs unemployed hands known as ‘reserve army of workers’. Larger number of workers compete with one another for fewer jobs. It lowers the price of labour and the workers are forced to work according to the conditions imposed on them by the employer.

Kartar’s case represents the situation in a representative form. The job is one and the candidates are three. Only one candidate could be absorbed, two must go without it. The one who bids the highest, is absorbed, the other two add to the reserve army making the situation more hopeless.’ Cut – throat competition of the capitalist security plays its negative role in the case of workers.

The unemployed educated youth of the country in this situation will either become lumpen or rebel. The novelist is of the opinion that only the class-conscious rebel-workers will be able to change the situation in favour of their class:-

“He (Kartar) was feeling as if he and the other candidate Jeeti, had sown the seeds of the solution of their woes by their own blood”. (104- seeds of fire).

This novel also reveals the fate of the small peasant in capitalist society. A few generations back, Kartar's family had a very big Chunk of land. But as the time passes the division of land amongst the brothers turns them into small or marginal peasants. Kartar's father and one of his father's brothers get 'merely three Kilas of land each which is not a viable unit. Both of them lose their ancestral property not due to their weaknesses of character, but due to the very logic of the objective reality of capitalist development in which small peasant is sure to loose.

The irony of the situation lies in the fact that the peasantry is not prepared to accept the fact of their being proletarianized continuously. Even the sincere sympathizers of this class are not ready to recognize the harsh reality and go on suggesting the solutions that turn out to be merely illusion Lenin, the great socialist revolutionary of Russia did a great service to mankind by his logical criticism of the Narodnik movement of his times which was in favour of peasant betty ownership.

A novel becomes a piece of art only when both the objective and subjective sides of a situation are interwoven inseparably in the structure and texture of the text. The very first novel "Seeds of Fire" of Meet reveals this quality of his fictional are at many places. For example, there is a situation in the novel when Kartar is compelled to sell his last Killa of land in order to bribe the 'Sardar' for getting his recommendation for the post of Lecturer. His agony in this situation is expressed in chapter No.7 of the novel from many angles. From a landed peasant he is going to be landless person that which is considered shameful according to the norms of his socio-cultural environment. It seems to him as if he is the destroyer of his father's dreams. The memories related to his land are so woeful that tears begin to roll down his face spontaneously. He is so dejected that he feels small while facing the village – fellows and in front of his mother and his own self. The unbearable and yet un-avoidable harsh reality makes him dumb like a stone.

The second novel of Mitter Sen Meet Kafila (the caravan) has a multiepisodic structure. The central tale of their novel revolves round Kartaro and her family. The familiar of Sardar Teja Singh and the Chaudhari of the village are opposed to each other. Baldev, Banty and Binder are addicted to intoxicants while Saroj, Jasbir, Surjit etc. belong to Naxalites. People like Buntly are the stooges of Sardar's family while the group

of Fauji player in the hands of the family of Chaludharis. The police and other public officials work for Sardar because they are served by him.

Although all these tales are inter - related but their relationship is not very coherent and they do not produce well knit pattern. Similarly there are many ordinary events which intensify the situation, but become a source of looseness in the structure of the novel and sometimes, detract the attention of the reader. The motive of all these, otherwise unnecessary details, is to present almost all the facts of the stormy period of seventies of the last century.

The central theme of the novel is concerned with the antagonistic interests of the basic classes of a village. One is the class of non working owners and the other one is a class of non owning workers. The novel starts with a description of the life of a land lord's family. This family has inherited a lot of land that is tilled by the tenants of the non owning workers. The labour of these people produces surplus value to be appropriated by the land lord's family. This practice is in vogue for couturier but the laboring people are not aware of their exploitation. They are tradition – ridden mass who take it as their fate ordained by some mysterious force whom they worships as God almighty and are so afraid of the land-lord that they cannot make even mild protest. All the generations of land lord's family have led the luxurious life that is cantered round wealth, women and wine. They think themselves to be all powerful to do any thing in the village. When they are challenged by somebody, they are non-plused and feel dishonored by the challenge which incites them for revenge.

The novelist has created a situation expressing the above position. Kartaro, a young and beautiful unmarried daughter of a poor man belonging to the Scheduled Castes, an addict and under the debt of land lord's family challenges the Sardar's nefarious design of dishonoring her and frees herself from his clutches by her strong will and bold action. Sardar too feels dishonored by this extra ordinary action of Kartaro that he has faced for the first time in his life. Revealing the injured self of the Sardar, the novelist writes:-

He was merely fifteen years old when he enjoyed the body of Santo the daughter-in-law of Nihala, a carpenter. After this he had started enjoying other women with no fear

or moral scruples. He has brought up in the lap of feudal values according to which the land lord has a privileged position of gratifying his lust with each and every woman of the village. It had got a silent acceptance from the village people also. The tradition was so strong that no body in the village was bold enough to challenge it.

But for the first time in the history of the village, a woman named Kartaro, challenged the high-handed-ness of the Sardar. This challenge makes him furious and he decides to conspire against her i.e. to weave a plot to entice her.

He employs Baldev at his own farm and gets him married to Kartaro whom she loves. Baldev, excited by the Sardar, burns the crops of his previous employee, the Chaudhary and thus falls into the clutches of the Sardar who saves him from the Police. Moreover, he is turned into an incorrigible addict. Along with two other addicts he begins to steal other articles to meet his needs. He does not spare even his own house. In this miserable condition he is arrested by the Police at the connivance of the Sardar and is killed secretly.

About 15-20 years passed but the Sardar who had done all this to attain Kartaro took no step to fulfill his motive. This seems to be a big plan in the structure of the novel. The Sardar could not be passive in the case.

During this period a daughter born to Kartaro grows young whom Chaudhary's son tries to rape her. In order to save her from the wolves of the village Kartaro along with her daughter begins to work in a Cotton factory situated in a town. But here too Kartaro faces the same problem.

All these situations emphasize the point that the helpless-non-owning working class is not only constrained to sell their labour power to the owners of the means of production and their stooges, but also that their women's honor is also at stake at every movement and place.

The novelist has made a very important observation regarding the shifting reality of the village. Along with the old feudal culture, a new type of trading culture is emerging at the village level. A family of Chaudharies belonging to same far off place settles the village and start petty shopping with the assistance of the Sardar's family. With the passage of time they grow rich through small trading and usury. They do not

squander money in unproductive ‘ventures’ or Luxury; rather they turn it into capital and purchase a lot of land from the poor and helpless peasantry of the village and thus become rich land-lord.

This situation turns the friendliness of the two families into enmity and they do their best to harm each other proving the saying that “two of a trade seldom agree”.

As far as the old non-working owner is concerned, he does exploit the village folk and plays with the honor of their women as if it is his right and the villagers are his slaves to obey his command. Yet he has the old life-style of showing his grandeur. He is awfully liberal in spending his money to please the Police, to entice their servants and to show his magnanimity through arranging religious and entertaining programs in the village. The Chaudharies on the other hand consider it a waste. In short nothing is more precious for them than the money.

The other segment of the rural population is the non-owning working class that has been delineated in the novel as an inseparable but the opposite side of the class of landlords. The novel reveals the utter poverty, total dependence and the most backward consciousness of this class. This tradition - dependent class is certainly ‘a class in itself’ but ‘to be a class for itself’ it will have to undergo a long, determined and continuous transformation. This is a task to be done by the politically conscious people having full faith in and understanding of Marxism. But till 1970 the rural labouring classes have been largely unorganized. The most backward aspect of this dismal situation as related to the slavish mentality of this class and their individual and separate interests.

Having no means of income they are compelled to work under the worst conditions forced by the owners. The novelist represents this situation by revealing the hard toil of a worker, Baldev. Not only this. The toiling masses are not at all aware of labour laws and being unorganized, they are unable to fight against the injustice that they have to face in their day to day life.

Being totally dependent on their employers they often fall a prey to the nefarious designs of the owners. The traditional landlord Zora Singh, for example, wants to entice Kartaro for quenching his lust. He knows that Kartaro and Baldev love each other. So, he gets Baldev employed as a menial in his fields; excites him to burn the grain of his

previous employers, Chaudharis, thus making him a culprit and dependent upon him. He also intimidates Kartaro's father, an incorrigible addict, forcing him to marry his daughter to Baldev, thus expecting to take her as his keep. In this game he does not succeed due to Kartaro's bold refusal. But Baldev too and of his co-workers became so much dependent on opium supplied by the Sardar who wants to take more work from them, that they feel like dead persons if they do not get opium or its alternative. When they became unfit for field work, they were shunted out.

No body was ready to give them any job and they themselves are not able to work because of the break down of their health. So they began to steal whatever they could from their own and other's houses. Thus they became petty thieves. But this illegal source of their income was too small to fulfill their needs.

As Zora Singh wanted to trap Kartaro for his sexual gratification, so in a case of small theft, he called the Police to prosecute them. With his influence in the Police, he got all the three killed by the Police secretly.

Most of the tradition – ridden women of the village were not opposed to Sardar's sexual advancement towards them; they rather felt honored in being dishonoured due to internalization of the traditional culture. Kartaro however, proved to be an exception. She had the courage to confront the Sardar and never fell into his trap. The novelist has created three situations that reveal Kartaro's courageous character. The first event occurs when only fifteen years old young Kartaro was caught forcefully by the Sardar when she entered his fields to get some grass. With rare physical dexterity and high morale she freed herself from the arms of Zora Singh saved her womanly honour and dignity leaving the Sardar repenting and feeling small at the challenge thrown by a girl belonging to the caste which was traditionally held subservient to the village land owners.

After getting her married to Baldev, the Sardar had begun to think of Kartaro as his own keep. But, again, he had to eat the humble pie at the hands of Kartaro when she repulsed all his advances.

After her husband's death she severs all her connections' with Sardar's family and beings to work in the house of Chaudharis. But there too, she had to face the same problem. Chaudhari's son catches her forcefully fact she again gets herself freed.

In this way, Kartaro proves herself to be made of some other stuff. She refuses to accept her slavish station traditionally given to her caste and gender. She does not bow before the adverse economic circumstances and she challenges the people who try to molest her with all their might.

When she does not find any way to earn her livelihood for herself and her two children, Jaila, her son and Harbanso her young daughter, she joins a cotton factory situated in a nearby town as day-laborer. Her daughter too, gets work there. But the atmosphere of the factory has the same type of problems as she was facing at the village level. The petty officials of the factory threw their lustful eyes on Kartaro's young daughter and both of them have to leave the job.

She faces another type of injustice here. She is paid less than she deserves according to the contract. This point reveals the backward nature of India's capitalism. Free India adopted the capitalist way of development in the area of world imperialism. More over feudalism in India was not transformed in a radical way by the Indian capitalist class. So, Indian capitalism developed into a commercial corrupt criminal and comprador kind. It could not employ the whole work force, thus adding continuously to the number of the unemployed. The situation forced the workers to work under the worst circumstances and to accept all the inhuman and immoral terms of the propertied classes. Kartaro rebels against these circumstances, thereby, voicing the message of the novelist.

During this period, some radical groups emerge in Punjab. They organize the working people against the properties classes. Kartaro, too comes in their contact and finds salvation in the ideology they are inclined to spread amongst the exploited and suppressed classes. She marries her young daughter, Harbanso, to one of them, sends her son, Jaila, to the nearby town in search of some employment as a daily labourer and makes up her mind to take revenge from Sardar by marrying him.

These steps create a paradoxical situation in the plot. Kartaro's contact with the strangers brings her ill-fame in the village. Her marriage with the Sardar aggravates it. Even the party workers do not know of her design. She kills the Sardar and his elder son and at their death makes a lot of grief-stricken hue and cry. Her action is of a rebellious nature and it should come to light to boost the morale of the villagers being tortured by

centuries – old class – caste oppression. But she would not succeed in executing her design if her intention is revealed. So, the whole situation' turns out to be useless exercise.

Kartaro is moved into the action to quench her thirst of taking personal revenge from the Sardar. It does not arouse her for a long collective war against the enemy classes. It could, on the contrary cool her anger after the revenge is taken. So the whole situation proves to be simply emotionally charged in raising the reader's awareness regarding the alternate goal.

Dr. Sukhdev Singh Khara, an established critic of Punjabi novel, has made a valid observation in one of his articles about these early novels. According to him these two novels contain "Romantic reformism of Nanak Singh, progressive coverage of Jaswant Singh Kanwal and realistic approach of Gurdial Singh".

As far as realism is concerned his opinion seems to reveal the middle class lop-sidedness of the concept that hides escapist ideology of the well- to- do intellectuals. Realism is never a static concept. At every moment of life, it goes on transforming itself following the laws of objective historical movement. In the contemporary era of global imperialism, the exploited and suppressed must embrace socialist-ideology to bring a revolutionary change in the situation. This needs incessant and conscious efforts on the part of all the well-wishers of the mankind. Only the method of socialist - realism in writing literature can serve this purpose. It means portraying of the objective situations in their multi-dimensional connections in such a way as to orientate the movement present in objective circumstances towards world-socialism.

The work done by Azad and his fellows at the village level is not futile as Dr.Kharra's comment expressed. This work is just the beginning that is to be developed consciously and continuously in order to build the socialist movement, the only way of the salvation of the masses to its climax. The work demands a lot of sacrifice, but if the price for the socialist revolution is not paid, the price for not making the revolution will be more cumbersome. The environmentalists of the area world warning repeatedly that nature itself will go against humanity as a whole, if the modern super-technology goes on exploiting it for the sake of super profits of the capitalists. So, the effort needs

revolutionary overthrow of the system based on private property. The class struggle between the owners and non-owners is a must to finish the classes. At this junctures it needs collective and continuous fight of the people against the modern Elite holding political power in their hands. Let us not forget one of the basic tenets of Marxism that “the appropriators must be appropriated”. This is not a work ten or twenty years as Mr. Kharra expects but even the smallest effort has its importance in arousing the masses. Let us remember Faiz in this connection.

Hum Akeley he chale the jan-ke manzil magar, log sath aate gae or karvan banta gya.

(I alone adopted the path going towards the destination but as the people continued to come forward accompany, it progressively took the shape of a caravan).

Chapter-II

A Critique of Law & Justice

With the publication of **Tahteesh** (The Investigation) in 1990, Mitter Sain Meet immediately came to lime-light. The novel was received with open arms by the common readers and academicians alike. An impressive function was held at Barnala under the presidentship of Dr. Joginder Singh Rahi, an established thinker of Novel and Punjabi novel. Dr. Raghbir Singh Sirjana, a progressive critic of Punjabi fiction and myself read out critical papers about the novel and a lively discussion amongst the intellectuals and novelists established the conclusion that “Tahteesh” has broken new ground in theme, structure and view-point of the novel.

Talking about the popularity of the novel, Meet answered a question of Dr. Sukhdev Singh Khara (Editor of the book “**Tahteesh da Vishlation**” (analysis of the novel Tahteesh) that both the readers and critics had appreciated his venture beyond his expectations. The popularity of the novel has proved wrong the notion that the critics in Punjabi are prejudiced or there is a lack of readers in Punjabi. The novel was published in two editions simultaneously first by Mukta Parkashan, Amritsar and the second by Lok Geet Parkashan, Chandigarh. Both the publishers published four thousand copies of the novel. All the copies were sold. The third edition was to be published by Lahore Book Shop, Ludhiana in 1992. So the novel was purchased and read by a large member of individual readers. Secondly, he had received hundreds of letters from the readers of the novel. These readers included students, prisoners, lawyers, Judges and Police officers. Dr. Attar Singh and Dr. Kesar Singh also went through the novel and appreciated it. There were artists who had a desire to render it into a film or T.V. serial or Drama. The novel caught attention of political leaders like Gyani Zail Singh and Surjit Singh Barnala. Politically the novel was welcomed by Punjab Lok Sabhyacharak Manch as well as Dal Khalsa International.

As far as the critics are concerned every established critic of Punjabi novel has gone through the novel. Many prominent critics wrote critical papers about it (some of these are included in this book). Guru Nanak Dev University prescribed the novel for M.A. (Punjabi) course while in Punjab University, Chandigarh and Punjabi University, Patiala Research Scholars wrote M.Phil dissertations on the novel”.

The judicial system of justice is the central theme of this novel. The novelist deals with this theme in his three interconnected novels, **Taftesh** (The Investigation-1990), **Katehra** (The Dock-1993) and **Sudhar Ghar** (The Reform House-2006). The first novel is concerned with the police culture, the second one with judiciary and the third one with reform through Jail. Thus the trio serial fictionalizes all the three phases of criminal justice.

As far as the first phase of the police culture is concerned, the novelist, in a session of questions-answers with Dr. Harbhajan Bhatia assigns the following three duties to the police:

1. To maintain law and order.
2. To ameliorate crime and
3. To challan the case to the Court after making the essential inquiries and collecting relevant evidence.

But the text speaks otherwise.

The abduction and murder of a child Bunti is the base on which the whole edifice of the novel is built. The first step to be taken by the police in the above crime, is the registration of F.I.R. The narrator tells that “only two policemen are present in the Police Station of the town. All the other employees are busy with tackling the problem of communal terrorism or providing security to the ministers who, these days, are busy with their frequent visits to their respective constituencies. Due to these engagements the police department of Punjab is unable to perform their routine duties. Though the number of reported crimes in Punjab is on the increase, the victims do not expect much from the police and the police, too, do not find time to check the crime.

The Deputy Superintendent of the Police himself has begun to handle the criminal cases at his own residence. He has acquired special powers from the government by making a false excuse that he is on the hit list of the terrorists. Actually he abuses these special powers for serving his own ends.

The desert like situation of the Police Station, a creation of the above circumstances, is irksome to the sentry Mukhtiar Singh and Munshi Baghel Singh. When Mukhtiar Singh was Naib Court, he had enjoyed good days. Alongwith extra income he earned power and praise, so much so that once he dared to clash with the Judge too. As a consequence he was transferred to the above mentioned Police Station.

Similar is the case of the Munshi. He is also feeling bored because of the non-arrival of any client (Asami). He is so much disgusted with the situation that he prays on the grave of 'Baba Zahir Ali Pir' to send some person who would liberate him from the clutches of the 'Deputy'.

The Munshi belongs to a poor family. He has to support a number of persons of his family (He had to get one of his father's sisters and three of his own sisters married and also to bring up his four brothers and meet the expenses of many other family customs).

The narrator also depicts the lives of some other officials and criminals who are leading a comfortable life because of their extra income. All these persons are corrupt and jealous of each other. They are, in short, evil-incarnate yet the novelist has an ambivalent attitude towards them. In his eyes all of them are victims of objective circumstances that generate in the very womb of the class system based upon the institution of private property. This system moulds the whole population in the frame of greed and selfishness. By hook or crook, every body rich or poor, is after earning more and more property, higher status and praise. A few succeed while many fail. This is the logic of class society and all have become slaves to this logic. So the characters in this novel are not individuals, but representatives of the system. The novelist makes a mockery of them and mockery is an amalgam of satire and sympathy.

In the above chapter the novelist also shows his mocking attitude while delineating the character of a journalist named Darvesh. By name Darvesh and by nature devil, he reaches the gate of the Police station and is saluted by Mukhtiar Singh out of fear. Darvesh is flattered. To raise his position in the eyes of his companions he saw them with a smile as if he were uttering “Behold”. This is again a mockery depicted by the subtle nuances of the word “behold”.

The description does not end here. They are received by the Munshi and are offered a seat. Darvesh is not a reliable person (he is a tout of the police), he is a black mailer. So the Munshi does not expect any favour from him. Yet he is unable to control his petty greed. He makes a false excuse that he has no piece of paper and asks them to bring at least ‘half coir of paper. Actually he writes on slip of a paper “two coires of paper, two ball pens of good quality, one dozen carbon papers and one inkpot Chelpark trade mark”.

During this time Nagpal who is a tout of the Police, arrives there. The Munshi feels happy at his arrival and asks the sentry to bring tea and some eatables for them. The sentry brought many things for which the payment was made by Suraj a relative of Bunti who had accompanied Darvesh.

Nagpal handed over a letter to the Munshi. The letter was written on the letter pad of militants. They had demanded Rs.5000/- as ransom besides instructing Lala ji not to arrange Ram Leela or Rass Leela in the town. If he did not obey, he would get the corpse of Banti by evening. Moreover, Nagpal tells that a utensil was lying on the outer floor of Lala Ji’s house and Bunti’s satchel was placed over it.

This gave a new twist to the whole episode- “A Bomb or Corpse of Bunti may be there in the utensil” thought Munshi. It was a serious matter for him so he, at once, registered the F.I.R., rang up to inform the Control Room and sent the copies of the report to the officers and felt relieved. Thus the whole issue of the registration of F.I.R. concerning Bunti’s abduction takes the form of an FIR of the investigating agency i.e. the Police.

Before probing further into the character and conduct of the police, the novelist makes a little diversion and tells about the family background of Bunti along with the search made for him by the civilians. He starts the story with the following funny news published in a news paper.

A few months back news was published in the news papers that on the day the summer vacation started, a child was shut in a class-room when he was asleep. Parents and the people related to the school searched out every nook and corner of the town, but the School was ignored. When the School reopened after vacation, only the skeleton of the child was available.

The artistic exaggeration of the news makes a fun of the situation and this is a device used by the novelist frequently and relevantly through out the text, thus turning the novel into a new genre of mockery.

Lala Hardial who was a teacher getting a very small salary does not remember even a single sigh of relief during his sixty years of life. He had faced the death of his father when he was merely eight years old and he had to bear the death of his son who died quite young. He had forgotten the pang of death and poverty in his sincere involvement with the self less social and religious activities for which he had earned the respect of all and sundry of the town. But the loss of his grand son, Bunti was unbearable for him and as a consequence his belief in God or good deeds had been shaken. The novelist depicts his agonized mental situation in a vivid and sympathetic manner, thus severing the connection between individual social and religious deeds on the one hand, and his mental peace or worldly comfort on the other. This very situation performs another function in the novel. It ridicules the general attitude of the public in the following words:-

The followers of Lala Ji were contemplating the situation differently. Lala ji appeared to suspect the worth of his selfless social welfare and worship of God for the last forty years. He was feeling as if he had been misleading the people by preaching God's power. Had there been a god in existence, he would have never troubled Lala Ji so much. This was the mental situation of Lala Ji due to the loss of his grand son.

But the people, due to their traditional way of thinking were of the view that Lala ji 'is a man of god like qualities' and that possibly he has connected himself with God. Some super-power may remind him of his past mistake and after forgiving him, he may let Lala ji know the place where Bunti was hidden. Not only this the common folk are following many more superstitions sincerely, but all goes in vain.

In addition to ridiculing these sincere but useless efforts of the common folk, the novelist makes fun of the sympathizer in another way. No doubt the sympathy is sincere, but the sympathy must come to the notice of Lala ji. So every one is trying to be as near to him as possible, even by pushing others back. And the novelist make the following sarcastic comment in the following words "The crowd went on increasing in the drawing room so much that Lala ji had to go to the wall for making space for the new comers".

The act of search for Bunti by the sympathizers also invites ridicule and laughter. The sincerity of the worker or the leaders has been accepted as a fact but the exaggerated the unplanned and the foolish way of making a search turns out to be a funny incident or a joke. The president of the Yuva Sangh takes command of the search into his own hands because he thinks the mob to be ignorant of the efficient way. He divides the workers into groups and sends them into all the directions of the town. But all the efforts go waste showing thereby the superfluous ego-centric wisdom of the president. When the last group of Yuva Sangh workers returned empty handed in the evening all of them were drowned into utter despair. So they had to go for reporting the matter to the police.

The reader has already been told that 'a cooking pot is found on the outer platform of Lala ji's house and Bunti's satchel is lying on the pot'. The civilians and the Police guess that in the pot may be lying Bunti's corpse or a bomb. Munshi Baghel Singh is so much perplexed by the guess that he at once registers FIR and informs police high ups about the incident and asks Shiv Parsad, an A.S.I. to visit the site and perform his duty.

The novelist has depicted Shiv Parsad as a caricature.

Though he is A.S.I. and quite high in the rank from that of the Munshi, yet the Munshi requests him in a manner of an order. Actually he is treated in the department as a fifth tyre who is assigned the duty for which no other person is available. Being a glutton and a drunkard his body has become so fat that he is unable to control it. Throughout his service he tried to take bribe only once and he was caught red-handed.

He is a harmless creature for whom the Rickshaw drivers care a fig. When they see him, they run away and the maximum punishment the helpless A.S.I. can give is to take out the valves out of their tyres.

He is a vain person when he takes a long pole, inserts an iron nail in its one edge, climbs up the roof, fastens the nail in the satchel and turn the pot upside down and he finds no bomb or corpse. Shiv's pleasure knows no bounds as he gazed at the spectators as if he would have been a hero, par excellence.

Thus Shiv Parsad's anecdote makes fun of another trait of the police. He is a person to be ridiculed but he also earns sympathy of the reader for his cowardice, his vanity, his tom-foolery.

With the entrance of Sub Inspector Manbir Singh as Incharge of Bunti's case, the text takes the track back. Unlike his junior Manbir comes of an affluent family of rural Punjab, inheriting 50 acres of land. His two elder brothers are well settled in Canada, while his only sister is married in a well-to-do family living in England. He would have himself shifted to Canada but for his need to manage the property in India. So when the chance arises he gets the post of Sub Inspector of police, along with the license for making property through corrupt-means. He has already doubled his land and his ambition for earning as much as he can, is also increasing day by day. His insatiable thirst for more and more money represents the general trait of the people living in modern capitalist society in which the institution of private property has touched its climax and grabbed all the other values without making any distinction between right and wrong. A few persons are able to fulfill their ambition at the cost of the masses. But the masses are not aware of this paradox of the objective situation and go on pursuing the

‘impossible’ because of their backward and slavish mentality regarding the institution of private property. The cult of money has moulded the psyche of the people and the unsuccessful will not be able to break the nexus until they are made aware of the objective reality by the intelligentsia who have a revolutionary inclination and despise the modern class society in spite of the fact that they are enjoying ‘good’ socio-economic status. The writer of this novel possesses this awareness and this is present in the text in the form of what is ‘said’ and what remained ‘unsaid’.

Manbir Singh is so ‘bold’ a police officer that he with his ‘influence’ not only turned the climate of the town in favour of the Sardar, a candidate in the assembly poll, but also got thousands of bogus votes polled in his favour. The Sardar won the seat with the help of his above mentioned skill and he became Chief Minister of the State.

It is a very small anecdote but very important one. It not only exposes the myth of fair elections of the “biggest-democracy of the world” but also brings to light the unholy alliance between politics and police. Moreover, the selfish mentality of local leader like ‘Master and Pardhan’ is also laid bare. Their loyalty comes under suspicion when they leave their old party and openly begin to support ‘Sardar ji’ following persuasion by Manbir Singh. The anecdote also reveals the backward and flexible mentality of the common voters who behave as puppets in the hands of the most corrupt and dishonest leadership. For the last sixty years the political parties of the ruling classes have been exploiting them. There has been no organization worth the name playing a positive role in organizing them on the line most suitable to their interests. Actually the so called ‘left’ has miserably failed to spread revolutionary political consciousness amongst them. That is why in India, the party in a minority has been ruling. The data shows that not more than sixty percent of votes are polled. The party that gets a majority of seats even though it gets less than half of the polled votes, rules the State. In contemporary India another phenomenon of multi-party alliance has emerged, pointing to the political crisis of the State.

Manbir Singh handles Bunti's case in a manner that serves his own interest. He arrests some culprits/criminals along with some innocent ones in this connection and releases them as soon as they lighten their pockets in his favour.

In this case he does not share the bribe with his immediate boss, Deputy Naunihal Singh. The Deputy feels annoyed and on the complaint of some town dwellers reports to the high-ups against him. As a consequence, he is transferred from the field to the Police Line. This punishment is considered the cruelest one in the police department because he loses the chance of making extra income.

Now comes the turn of Deputy Naunihal Singh. He, too, arrests some criminals of his area in the name of the investigation of Bunti's case, and releases them after charging a lot of money. So Bunti's case is handy tool that is used by the police personnel right from Sentry to the Deputy without exception. All make it a point to earn as much as possible and without any moral scruples or fear of law. Some of them succeed, while others do not.

The writer does not discuss these characters as individuals, but as representatives of the system of which they are part and parcel. And this is the point where he leaves the traditional path of moral or reformist Punjabi novel and creates a new one.

A criminal is a person who violates the prevalent law. Manbir Singh and Naunihal Singh deal with criminals such as flesh-traders, drug-traders, murderers, smugglers and adulterators, liquor distillers etc. not with a view to check them, but with the objective of getting as much money as is possible out of their pocket and then set them scot free. Moreover they arrest them, of course temporarily, to settle scores with their enemies who are not only criminals, but are in conflict with each other too. Manbir Singh would arrest not only criminals but also these who are innocents according to the prevalent law with the motive of getting bribe from them. Though Manbir Singh is punished in the long run because his senior officer turns against him and town-dwellers also condemn this type of cruel action, but the novelist is clear in his mind that the police do not spare even the

citizens who work within the limits of prevalent law. (We shall evaluate the nature of prevalent law at the proper time)

The most heinous character of the above mentioned episode comes to light when the reader is told that all this has been done in the name of solving Bunty's case. So it can be safely concluded that the police is a legally sanctioned organization of criminals that is in alliance with the outlawed and unorganized culprits.

The police tries some other methods like meeting with the citizens, installing of barricades and imposition of curfew to find out the whereabouts of Bunti and his abduction. But all these methods become devices in the hands of the novelist to expose the character of the police personnel, to bring to light the unlawful activities of the rich, to go deep into the genesis of different types of crimes and to depict the miserable plight of the poor etc. For instance, the barricade at Hadyiya road crossing is under the charge of Darshan Singh, but he is least interested in the search for Bunty's case. Instead he begins to check the vehicles that reach there and under one or the other pretext receives bribe from them and lets them go. The writer mentions two specific cases showing the alliance between the police and the rich. One case is related to Shamlal, a contractor of liquor. Sham Lal has made a big fortune through legal as well illegal activities and Darshan Dingh has been his 'friend'. So he does not want to harass them. But his colleagues only allow him to go when he along with his wife and daughter comes out of the jeep and the police men enjoy their bodies through their lusty eyes.

Similarly Darshan Singh allows a truck full of poppy husk to go further when he gets ten thousand rupees as bribe. The truck belongs to Sardar (Sardar is any body's guess) who has earned his wealth through trade in intoxicants. Similar it is the case with the Model Town residents who have been searched by an honest Police Inspector, Ami Chand Sharma dwellers, an exception (that proves the rule). These residents live quite comfortably because of the fact that they have been able to earn much through the legal and illegal opportunities they chance to get.

Traders, contractors, head constables and overseers are the owners of these kothis (mansions). Curfew has proved a blessing in disguise for them as they get a lot of free time to enjoy themselves.

There is also a village like area of the town. This area is searched by another police official Gajjan Singh. In this area live not only smugglers and sellers of illicit liquor, opium, poppy and flesh traders but also militants of different hues and colours. Though Gujjan Singh gets a lot of information about these miscreants and can make money but is interested in getting some clue about Bunti in which he fails miserably.

Parallel to the residential colonies of the well-to-do sections of the town dwellers, there are slum areas in which the wretched of the earth live. They perform the most filthy, risky, tiresome and low-paid tasks of the society. They live under the worst conditions, making their living through doing menial jobs like rickshaw or rehri pulling, working as domestic servants, owning small piggeries, poultry, selling of saag (green leafy vegetable of mustard) or datans of Kikkar (twigs of acacia) or illegal acts like petty thefts, stealing of animals, peddling contraband for big smugglers, pickpocketing etc. The police consider them hereditary criminals and whenever any crime occurs in the area, the police falls upon them like a curse, beating, looting and arresting them indiscriminately. The link between this poor and deprived section of the town dwellers and the police is commented upon as “After beating the innocents, carrying the needed things for court cases, Boojja Singh arrested Shamoo, Shinda, Ginda and Bachni and took them away with him”.

The beggars are also included in this category. The novelist has depicted them through a scene of Kusht Ashram (Home for lepers). The atrocities and greediness of the police are prominent even here. They fall upon them like vultures, beat them without any excuse and are annoyed when they find nothing worth looting. While coming back Des Raj was at a loss to understand where had those blankets, quilts and sweaters gone about which there was so much in the

newspapers. Actually the above articles donated for lepers by the citizens had been moved into the homes of the administrators of the Ashram.

All the efforts of the police go in vain as far as Bunti's case is concerned. The Deputy Commissioner Mr. Gupta and the S.P. Mr. Khan, incharge of the case, are much disturbed when to their rescue, a chance information of the receipt of Bunti's corpse is received.

The officers-Incharge are afraid of the public reaction if the information regarding the corpse is made public. So the S.P. Mr. Khan suggests that a fake encounter between the police and the terrorists should be enacted in which the terrorists flee away leaving the corps behind. But the information leaks out before the drama is enacted. Now Gupta suggests another way. The corpse may be placed in the unoccupied half-built quarters behind the hospital and it should appear as if it was found by chance.

With the enacting of the above mentioned drama the first part of the novel ends.

The second part of the novel opens with a scene of Gandhi Basti. It is inhabited by non-owning, unorganized and socially unaware untouchables. Unemployed or under employed inhabitants of this Basti eke out their livelihood by their hard labour of day and night. Curfew has proved a curse for them as they have not been able to go out for work. The novelist stresses their starvation conditions by telling that Gafoor a petty shopkeeper has sold all his eatables to the inhabitants; so much so that his wife has given to them the whole flour which she herself earnestly needed. So the news of the lifting of curfew pleases all of them. Meeta, one of the central characters of the trio-serial novel, goes to the market along with his Rehra (Cart) to earn something. But he is unable to do so because almost the whole town has reached the deserted hospital where Bunti's corpse is lying. The novelist tells that Meeta's father was a pickpocket and Meeta had been trained in the job by his father. For years together, Meeta along with some of his associates was engaged in the job of pick-pocketing. Though he enjoyed himself when he succeeded in the job, yet he had to pay a large share of the loot to the

‘Dada’ of the bus stand, the Rickshaw-pullers and to the police personnel. Not only this, he has been also arrested many a time by the police and imprisoned. Secondly whenever any incident of pick-pocketing in his area of operation comes to light the police arrest him and he has to pay the looted amount from his own pocket.

This detail of Meeta’s life tells that those who are deprived of legitimate means of livelihood are constrained to adopt illegal occupations and here too they are harassed by many persons including the police.

Gurmeet Singh a government lawyer had helped him to quit that occupation and earn his bread through cart-pulling.

The irony lies in the fact that the shadow of his past life does not leave him and people are not ready to believe him. At last Meeta reaches the spot where the police is enacting the fake drama of Bunti’s murder in order to make it look more plausible. Here the novelist discloses through the search made by the trained dogs of the police that the corpse was brought on this spot by Ramesh, a police official in the police jeep and the dogs have spotted both. But the ignorant and angry people do not trust the dogs and believe in the story concocted by the police.

At last the corpse is taken to the civil hospital for postmortem. Though it is needless yet it has to be done for satisfying the requirements of prevalent law which is too cumbersome and complex.

Here the novelist brings another character Joginder Singh, who has to perform his duty of postmortem but he refuses to do so without receiving a bribe of Rs.50/-. His refusal is condemned by all, but the novelist adopts a realistic attitude when he writes, ‘the corpse has been lying in the dead house for two hours. The sun is about to set and the public demand that the corpse be handed over to them immediately so as to complete the funeral rites before sun set. The doctor is also calling him repeatedly but Joginder Singh thinks otherwise. He requires extra income for his family to pull on. His arrival at an auspicious or happy occasion is considered a bad omen. So he does not budge an inch.

This is the approach of the novelist that makes the whole text realistic and out of the purview of so called moral calling.

Joginder Singh has another grudge too. His duty is to cleanse the hospital, not to help the doctor in conducting a postmortem. He performs this duty only to earn something more which is bribe in the common parlance, but an unavoidable course of action for a poor man getting much less than necessary for his bare needs.

In the meantime a Congress leader offers money to Joginder Singh and the irony is that he cannot accept it from him. “And when Joginder Singh began to cut Bunty’s belly, he was feeling as if Babu ji the leader has snatched bread from his own children”.

We have already mentioned that one of the major issues of the novel is related to the intimate link between the police and politics. Manbir Singh, a police officer, helps Sardar ji to win the elections from his constituency in two ways. He cajoles two local leaders in favour of Sardar ji by promising them good fortune if Sardar ji wins. These leaders have no good status in their party and are apposed tooth and nail by the established leadership. So they see their future bright in helping Sardar ji and they actually begin to enjoy wealth and power when ‘Sardar ji’ becomes Chief Minister after winning the elections.

Manbir Singh also gets many fake or bogus votes polled in favour of Sardar ji by abusing his power. This is a telling illustration of the fall of political culture of the State. The situation of all the political parties is unstable because all of them are after seeking their selfish interests and have left all the ideals of common welfare. Politics has become a trade to be adopted for personal profit. The system is in doldrums and nobody knows which way the wind blows. So every candidate of the party uses all the methods at his disposal with no moral scruples in order to win the elections. Sardar ji is not an exception to the practice. He persuades Manbir Singh to help him and Manbir Singh knows he stands to gain from the good will of Sardar ji in future. In this sense, Sardar ji and Manbir Singh were tied to each other through their mutual interests.

The text also speaks of the general political atmosphere of Punjab in the eighties. There were two major contestants in the constituency of Sardar ji. The town was with the Congress whose slogan was secularism and the party had fielded Babu ji, a popular person among the public because of his polite and sociable nature. Sardar ji was himself not communal in his dealings with the people but he was a candidate of the communal party named Akali Dal, Sikhs were in a majority in Punjab, so it was essential for the Congress to drive a wedge between the Sikh voters and this was done in a very subtle and sophisticated manner. A communal terrorist group was created that gave the slogan of Sikh State and pursued militant politics to achieve the goal. Thus a large section became separatist in ideology and did not support Sardar ji's candidature.

Another factor that could go against Sardar ji was the influence of progressives who stood for secularism. So his fate was on very shaky grounds. The insight of the novelist lies in the fact that though the town's folk were in favour of Babu ji, yet when his party tried to cash on the communal feelings of Hindus, progressives turned against him, while a majority of rural votes were polled in favour of Sardar ji making his victory sure.

This episode provides the real nature of India's political culture. The pro-people communist parties have been losing their following day by day because of their double character. They have not analysed the class-character of secularism and pursuing the politics of choosing the lesser evil they have been misleading the public and themselves.

Another situation arises when the Chief Minister of the State, on his visit to his home, orders the police to nab the culprits before the last death rites of Bunty are performed. In order to pacify the towns's people he transfers most of the police-personnel who had failed to save Bunti's life and arrest the culprits though they were very much present in the town during this period. Actually the police remained busy with making money, torturing town-dwellers and settling personal score with each other and offenders of law, using Bunty's case as a false excuse. The public had turned against the police and the Chief Minister not only

earned their goodwill by transferring them but also posted his tested police-officers in the town. He, also, gave unlimited powers to the police so as to make the campaign a success.

But this holy alliance between the police and the Chief Minister fell on the commoners like a bolt from the blue. The police arrested not only those poor and petty culprits whose names were present in their registers but also those whose history sheets had been closed because they had stopped their illegal activities and started earning their livelihood through socially approved work. Pala and Meeta are two specific cases to be mentioned in this respect. Pala had become a thief because his parents had taught him so to earn extra chips. He along with his group had started committing petty thefts and passing through stealing cycles, scooters and cars had adopted the occupation of burglary. He had been punished many a time, but he remained undeterred. At last a ferocious police man made him almost blind and lame. So, he had to refrain from his illegal activities and joined the shop of Jeewan, an Arhtia, as a manual worker.

He had been warned about the police atrocities before hand by a policeman, Balwant, but he could not run away because he knew that the police would arrest his pregnant wife and rape her besides beating her mercilessly. So, he went to the Police Station himself along with Jeewan Arhtia.

We have already described the case of Meeta who, with the assistance and persuasion of Gurmeet a government lawyer, had become a cart-puller. The police had arrested him, too.

A whole chapter has been devoted to the description of third-degree methods applied by the police with no discrimination whatsoever. The case of a student leader of Sikh Student's Federation is a solid example. He tries his level best to assure the police that he and his organization have nothing to do with the murder of Bunty as this was against their principles, but without paying any attention to his assurances, arguments and requests, he was tortured badly. The scene is gruesome and it appears that those policemen were not human beings but brutes having no feelings.

The irony of the whole exercise lies in the fact that all goes in vain and the police fail to find even a petty clue regarding the crime.

At this stage pro-people politics enters the arena through the fearless personality of Baba Gurdit Singh. He belonged to a well-to-do family and himself was a Class-I officer. But his human sensibilities were awakened when, by chance, he met one of his classmates. This person was very bright in his studies and his teachers had a very high opinion about him. But he was the son of a poor labourer and poverty had spoiled his career so much that he had to become a rickshaw-puller after leaving his studies half way. Baba ji begins to think of the real cause and solution of this injustice and decides to dedicate his life to spread a revolutionary awareness amongst the suffering humanity.

The police had arrested one of his ardent followers, Ashok, who had remained absent from the town, without the prior permission of the police. This unjustified act of the police provoked Baba ji. He alone went to the Police Station and got Ashok released with an exemplary courage.

The dauntless action of Baba ji had demoralized the police so much that the police was constrained to free all the persons arrested during the last two days. A demoralized SHO Lal Singh decided to go on leave instead of handling the Bunti's case. But when the government allowed him to arrest even Baba ji he started re-thinking about the case and worked out a plan in connivance with the local unit of 'Sangh' to organize a procession in which the police itself and its touts would indulge in violence so as to provoke Baba ji for some violent action which would be illegal and thus provide a valid excuse for his arrest. The trick succeeded and Lal Singh was able to arrest Baba ji along with some of his ardent supporters.

But the Sangarsh Samiti had spread its branches far and wide. Its activists filed a case against the police in the High Court and the Court appointed an officer to verify the case. The officer checked the whole matter and ordered Lal Singh to free the innocent followers of Baba ji. Lal Singh had to obey the orders because he could not hide his high handedness, nor he could woo the officer.

This was another defeat of the police and a live example of the collective consciousness and courage among the people.

There was only one day left with the police to arrest the culprits before the last rites of Bunti. It will be a blot on the face of the police and the Chief Minister representing the State, if the culprits could not be nabbed before the fixed time. Lal Singh had lost his morale and was languishing in despair when all of a sudden an idea struck to his mind. He at once called an emergency meeting and with the consent of all mooted a plan to present Pala and Meeta as murderer of Bunti before the court. The plan was carried out in the most secret manner. Both the culprits were taken to the Court in a closed Jeep. A huge crowd gathered around the Jeeps of the police. The curiosity for information about the culprits was so much heightened that each and every person present in the 'procession' was keen to see the 'dreaded culprits'. The town-dwellers, especially the followers of Sangh, were over-jubilant and started raising slogans in favour of the police. The affluent residents of the town had announced to honour the police in the evening and that, too, in the presence of the Chief Minister. They would also recommend promotion for the police personnel who with their well-planned, courageous and timely action had, at last, successfully solved a 'blind case'.

The Sanghis were so much excited that they raised a temporary platform on the ground lying vacant in front of the Court and their leaders started praising the police and the Sangh that had taken so much trouble to check and punish the most heinous crime in history.

But the plot hatched by the police and the Sangh was foiled when workers of the Sangharsh Samiti told the gathering that Pala and Meeta the so called murders of Bunti had been in police custody for the last ten days. The truth fell like a bomb shall on the Sangh and the crowd was shocked to hear the truth. Thus the episode again went into favour of pro-people politics.

The strangest event of the episode is related to Gurmeet Singh who is a government lawyer. When he was requested by the police inspector to sign the challan papers of Pala and Meeta he refused and when he saw Pala and Meeta

under arrest, he was so much agitated that he resigned from his post and joined the Sangharsh Samiti.

But this very fact of increasing influence of Sangharsh Samiti has been vehemently criticized by a group of critics. They are of the opinion that pro-people politics though desirable is not feasible. It is simply idealistic to think of the future perspective of mankind as bright. Right from the beginning up to now no change has occurred in human nature. So Baba ji Gurmeet and so many other workers of Sangharsh Samiti are simply the creation of the writer's wishful thinking. Even the sincere and sensible efforts of pro-people organizations are simply a waste.

There is another group of intellectuals. This group believes that it is in the very nature of man to dream to struggle for the fulfillment of his dreams, but defeat is inevitable. So they do support the contention of the creation of a Hero, but as the most tragic Hero.

Mitter Sain Meet rejects all the above notions. He is of the opinion that though the pro-people struggle of our times is very weak in the face of anti-people establishment, yet this State of things is due to the fact that the exploited and suppressed masses are in the strong grip of ideas that go against them. It is a matter of transforming their consciousness in such a manner as would make their pro-people politics strong. And this is to be done by the conscious efforts of those who stand for socialist revolution.

The above mentioned ideology of the novelist is very meaningful in the present context of Globalization caught in the web of pro-establishment ideology. The well-to-do academicians have not only ignored the imperialist character of the present global encirclement, they have declared also that history of mankind has ended thereby. But the increasing anti-establishment revolts throughout the world after 1990 have falsified the whole ideology of globalization. The ideologues of these revolts have firm belief in the movement of history and declare that the present crisis of capitalism will end only with the establishment of world socialism which is sure to be brought by the collective, conscious and

organized movement of workers of all the countries. Literature must serve the movement, if it is worth its name.

Katehra (The Dock) is the second part of **Tafteesh** (The Investigation) as well as having an independent entity of its own. In this novel the writer depicts the real essence of the prevailing Court-culture. The novel is comprised of three distinctive but interconnected phases of development.

Tafteesh ends with the information that Pala and Meeta, two innocent persons, have been declared as murderers of Bunti by the Police in a melodramatic manner. The police is aware of the false game they have played. But they were constrained to do it in order to save their skin. The Chief Minister of the State had ordered the police to arrest the culprits before the last rites of Bunti are performed. But the police have not been able to find out even a little clue of the actual culprits. So they enacted the above mentioned fake drama.

Now the police have to submit the challan of the case in the Court and Nazar Singh has been deputed for it. In common murder cases the investigator has some power to make some extra income from both the victims as well as the accused. But in case of Bunti's murder there is no possibility. So, Nazar Singh is least interested in handling this case.

According to the demand of law, the challan of the case has to be filed within ninety days, other wise the chances of grant of bail to the accused are brightened. Eighty five days have already passed. So Nazar Singh has only five days at his disposal to perform his duty.

But there are many pitfalls in his way. Firstly, the case must be scrutinized by the legal cell of the government before its submission. So Nazar Singh contacts Surinder Kumar, a government Advocate, in this connection. Surinder Kumar had obtained this position by giving five thousand rupees to the District Attorney because he knew that this position would bring a lot of money to him. So he demands bribe from Nazar Singh in Bunti's case too. Nazar Singh pays hundred rupees to him from his own pocket but Surinder Kumar feels insulted due to this meager sum of money and refuses to scrutinize the case. But when Nazar Singh

tells him that the Deputy wanted to withdraw the work of one court from him because he was overworked and that he would also request the Deputy to do the same, Surinder Kumar came to his sense and agreed to check Bunti's case immediately.

After this Nazar Singh had to face the Court-clerk. He, too, demanded bribe in the case. But Nazar, instead of paying to him anything, went to meet the Magistrate in his retiring room and told him the whole story. The Magistrate ordered the clerk to check the case thoroughly and asked Nazar Singh for preparing the copies to be attached with the case. Thus the Magistrate pleases both the officials.

The novelist has shed light on the character and conduct of the petty officials of the Court through the above mentioned event. These officials get a very low salary which is not adequate for maintaining their petty middle class standard. So they depend on bribe and are not ready to spare even their colleagues. This very insight of the novelist into the reality separates him from the reformists who tend to link the problems with the evil character of the individuals. In the opinion of the author the good and the evil in an individual are directly related to the system in which he is brought up.

With the submission of the challan in the Court the novel enters the second phase of the case known as 'trial'. Modern system of justice is based upon written laws which had many a flaw because the law has been framed to, ultimately, serve the ruling classes of capitalist-society based upon private property, accumulation of capital and maximization of profit at the cost of both the habitat and its inhabitants. The major participants in this phase are Judges, Advocates and witnesses. The judiciary is considered 'the seat of justice' and its qualities of impartiality, independence, objectivity, rationality are amply emphasized and advocated. As the law on which the issue of legal justice is decided is the most complicated phenomenon, so it demands specific type of qualifications and training. A laymen even though permitted to plead his case himself in the court he is unable to do so because he lacks knowledge of the law,

its procedural considerations and its operational intricacies. So a new profession of advocates has emerged. An advocate is a person who is at least LLB. and is issued a licence for advocacy by the authority appointed by the government running the State.

The novelist has described a good number of advocates in the text of 'Katehra'. Although all these advocates earn their livelihood in a money dominated social system through the same occupation of advocacy yet they have different social backgrounds and mental attitudes. The text depicts the lives of many advocates in order to emphasise the similarities and dissimilarities. For example we have already noted that both Gurmeet and Surinder Kumar belong to poor families and work as public prosecutors. But Gurmeet resigns from his post after putting in ten years of service when his pro-people conscience is unable to tolerate the injustice being done to innocent Pala and Meeta (Even the police knows that they had nothing to do with Bunti's murder case, but in order to save their skin they file a case of murder against them). Surinder Kumar, on the other hand is motivated by the extra income he can earn out of his case and suggests to Nazar Singh that he may concoct a false story supported by false witnesses, if he wants to succeed in the case.

The text speaks of another lawyer, S.P. Bhandare who comes of an affluent family and through bribing the judges (by giving his Kothis rent-free to them) wins the cases of his clients, thus adding to his coffers more and more money. He knows no moral qualms and believes in the prevalent 'way of the world'.

There is another lawyer named Mohan ji, who belonging to lower middle class is afraid of dealing with murder cases and limits his practice to the lower Courts. His **modus operandi** is quite different. He keeps a good record of the professional witnesses and uses this knowledge in winning the cases.

The case history of Pyare Lal needs elaborate treatment because it represents the objective reality in true detail. His father is a petty shopkeeper of a village who makes his both ends meet with great difficulty. Motivated by a rich

life style of a lawyer he chooses to make his son a lawyer. His son, Pyare Lal is a talented and industrious young man, who, despite insurmountable economic hardships gets a first class first in LLB.

He appears in the examination for the selection of Judges twice , does well in written test, but fails in the interview because of lack of money and recommendation.

To earn his livelihood he tries to become a junior partner of an established advocate, but he is accepted because he has no good social links needed to attract the clients.

This dismal situation frustrates him and he becomes a drunkard. In order to pull on, he adopts the profession of malpractices in the Court. In short he becomes a lumpen and loses all his talent and hope for a socially acceptable life. Gurmeet is impressed by his talent and brings him on the right path as he advises him to relate himself with the case of Pala and Meeta through Lok Sangharash Samiti. At the end of the novel the writer creates a situation that is simultaneously tragic and hopeful. His brilliant argument is dashed to the ground and the Judge convicts Pala and Meeta as murderer because of the demand of the government and reactionary politics of the town.

The challan of Bunti's murder case was submitted in the Court of Additional Sessions Judge, Satinder Nath, after the lapse of 90 days. According to the prevalent law of the land after ninety days the culprits have to be released on bail. But the government and the reactionary politics of the town are against it. So the date of submission of the challan was shown in the receipt register one day before the stipulated time, an illegal step, but the first step favourable to the government taken by the Court.

Justice Nath in whose court the bail application of Pala and Meeta has been moved by Lok Sangharash Samiti reached the Court always well in time. But on the day of hearing of the bail application he was late by about half an hour. The Narrator tells about the opinion of some lawyers regarding the character of Nath. He is a corrupt and characterless judge according to them who can cross

any limits for his self interest. To substantiate his opinion the narrator used his tested technique of describing his antecedents at a time when the text requires a time gap. The junior lawyers and Yuva Sangh are not happy with his **modus operandi**. So they approach the Chief Minister to transfer Bunti's murder case to some other court. But the Chief Minister only transferred the Judge.

Gurmeet Singh, an advocate of Pala and Meeta, too played a trick. He got the bail application of Pala and Meeta placed just after that of terrorists, because he thought that if the terrorists' application was accepted Pala and Meeta's application will have to be accepted because their case is less serious as compared with that of the terrorists. The novelist gives the following detail of contrast between the two cases:-

1. The terrorists had been accused of double murder while Pala and Meeta were the culprits for only one murder of Bunti.
2. One of the terrorists was arrested at the very site of the incident, but in the other case the police did not get even a single clue during one and half month after Bunti's murder.
3. The case of the terrorists was based upon the evidence of eye-witnesses, while the police had no eye-witness against Pala and Meeta, rather some eye-witnesses stood in favour of the culprits.
4. The witnesses furnishing evidence against the terrorists were Bank employees or Bank customers, who being innocent citizens had to be considered trustworthy by the Court but sixty per cent of the witnesses in Pala and Meeta's case were police touts.
5. The most weighty argument was concerned with their presence after the bail. The terrorists would go underground while Pala and Meeta would not do it because Jeewan Arhtia and Baba ji would be responsible for their security. But the judge under the threat of terrorist's friends took no time to bail them out while he rejected the bail application of Pala and Meeta due to his favourable attitude towards the government. Moreover, S.P. Bhandari, a private Advocate from Bunti's side had appeared in the court along with a heap of law books, 4-5 other

advocates and 8-10 Sangh workers. The Sangh workers had raised slogans against the innocent Pala and Meeta outside the Court. The Judge made up his mind under the influence of the above scene for the rejections of Pala and Meeta's bail. Ignoring the argument of Gurmeet, he altogether rejected it at his own discretion.

This is an instance of favouritism implicit in the prevalent law which was substantiated by the judgment of High Court in the above mentioned case. The case was argued by the Advocate General on behalf of the government. It means that the government wanted to reject the bail. Moreover the Deputy Director of the Public Relations department himself had led a dozen of correspondents armed with cameras and tape-records to the Court. These motivated movements by the government had so much influenced the Judges that they did what the Government wanted i.e. rejection of the bail. The narrator comments over the judgment in the following satirical manner.

After thoroughly thinking about the case, the Judges had concluded that the government was in crisis and it was the prime duty of the High Court to take a stand favourable to the government and the Court had done its duty'.

This is a bitter comment that exposes the 'holy' alliance between the judiciary and the government.

The whole text of the novel is full of pungent satire on this 'holy' marriage between petty politics and jaundiced judiciary. Before any further probe into the relationship between the two as depicted in the novel a whole chapter has been devoted to the enmity between established political parties and Lok Sangharash Samiti. Before the declaration of Pala and Meeta as culprits, Akalis, Congress and Jan Sangh were in league with the Samiti. But after their arrest as the culprits, the police had restrained them against the public interest. So all the above mentioned parties had severed their links with the Samiti on one pretext or the other. Akalis were a ruling party in Punjab. So the Chief Minister advised the local leader (Jathedar) to withdraw from the politics of Comrades. In addition the Jathedar had

gained some official clout with the assistance of the C.M. and this was a matter of satisfaction to him.

As far as Congress was concerned, it was a ruling party at the Centre. It had adopted a strategy to contain fundamentalism in Punjab through the Akali government. So the Centre had instructed the Punjab Congress to co-operate with the government. The Jan Sangh was never loyal to the Samiti. It had assisted the Samiti because of Bunti murder case. As soon as Pala and Meeta were shown arrested as culprits, they had nothing to do with the truth or falseness of the action.

In this way the novelist has exposed all the major political parties having mass-base in Punjab. They were in favour of status quo, though they would take some steps as and when required by the situation.

The narrator has told that the government, under the pressure of some political parties, lawyers and citizens has transferred Mr. Nath and Mr. Mota Singh has taken the charge of the court of Additional Sessions Judge in his place. So the case of Pala and Meeta has to be tried in the Court of Mr. Mota Singh.

We are already conversant with the history of the case that Pala and Meeta have been accused not on any fact or evidence. They have been made a scapegoat by the police to save them from the wrath of the Chief Minister and the Chief Minister, too, is interested in the arrest of the culprits because the case is related to his home town where from he has won his Assembly seat and he intends to keep his stronghold intact for the future. All this information leads to the conclusion that modern system of justice is interested only in gaining every thing but justice.

During the trial, when Pyare Lal cross examines the government witnesses, they lose all the ground because they had forged false evidence to support the concocted story of the police. Pyare Lal's argument is so sharp that all the cloaks hiding the truth are torn asunder and reality comes to the limelight. The prosecution has to eat a humble pie in the court and the evidence falls flat having no feet to stand upon.

The same happens with the private witnesses who have been presented in the court by the police. Though they have been fully trained by S.P. Bhandari but as Mohan ji cross-examines them, they, too, lose the ground and the case becomes all the weaker.

On the other hand, when Jiwan Arhtiya and Baba ji, who are considered men of character and social status in the town, appear as witnesses of the defence side, their evidence could not be falsified by the prosecution. So, Justice Mota Singh had reached the conclusion that Pala and Meeta were innocent.

Now the trial enters the third phase when judgment is to be declared. As the prosecution was not able to prove any thing against Pala and Meeta, it had lost all hope to win the case. Special Public Prosecutor, Gian Singh, who had been deputed to pursue the case, was so much disgusted with the case that some times under the fit of despair; he would think that he should do the real duty of a public prosecutor by informing the Court that the accused being innocent might be acquitted. But on a second thought he is over-powered by his future interest and would begin to take interest in the case.

Similar is the mental situation of the bar. On the one hand the advocates would appreciate Pyare Lal and Mohan Ji but on the other they are jealous of them as their success might harm their future.

The mental conflicts of Justice Mota Singh and Pyare Lal have been fictionalized with more artistic subtlety and elaborate description. Mota Singh belongs to a rich land-lord family of rural Punjab. He is well connected with the elite sections. One of his relatives, Shingara Singh, is a Judge in the Punjab High Court. He gets Mota Singh appointed as Additional Sessions Judge by his influence for which Mota Singh feels obliged to him. Shingara Singh is a man of the government and wants to get Pala and Meeta punished through Mota Singh as desired by the Chief Minister of the State. So he sends a confidential message to him to do the same.

But Mota Singh has reached the conclusion that Pala and Meeta have nothing to do with Bunti's case. His conscience compels him to do justice and

release Pala and Meeta. But he feels obliged to his relative, Shingara Singh and wants to act accordingly. Though he is not after money, yet name and fame do allure him. So his sense of justice and his personal interest put him in mental tension. He records his judgment many a time but tears it into pieces. At last he acts according to the wishes of his relative, Shingara Singh, and with a very heavy heart he pronounces death sentence for both Pala and Meeta. His mental agony is revealed when for the first time he breaks the nib of his pen and leaves the Court with a painful sense of guilt.

Similar is the case with Pyare Lal whose intelligent cross-examination defeats the arguments of the prosecution and turns the case in favour of the defendants. But he wants to be sure of the judgment that can be of utmost importance for his future. Gurmeet and Baba ji also hope about the victory in the case, but their approach is more realistic. When Pyare Lal asks them about the judgment they tell him that if the judgment is based upon law, they will win otherwise lose. Both of them are clear that the judgment is to fulfill the need of the government. But this hard reality is not digestible to Pyare Lal. So he opposes it vehemently.

Actually Pyare Lal's thinking and feelings represent the limitation of middle class mentality. This type of mentality believes in the prevalent system and is hopeful that by dint of hard labour and intelligence the goal of personal success is achievable. Gurmeet and Baba Ji carry no such illusion. So they tell Pyare Lal:-

Do not feel sad. Our victory is not limited to the punishment or release of Pala and Meeta. Our destination is at a long distance. We may lose the case. Even then we will be victorious. We have made the people aware. We have told them about the duties of a true Judge and the Bar. We aim to build a system of justice that is sure to give justice to the people cost free. To achieve it we shall have to struggle for long. This case is just a starting point of the struggle. This is the point where victory lies.

The judgment goes against the law. Pyare Lal is unable to bear the shock. He throws the black coat, a symbol of law, at the feet of Justice Mota Singh with an intolerable anguish. Mota Singh's inner self dares not to trample the law. He crosses the black coat without touching it while the Deputy of the Police tramples it under his foot. The novelist ends the novel with the following words expressing the tragic irony of the prevalent system of justice.

Mota Singh's heart cried with pain when he saw the coat trampled. Khaki uniform had trampled the black coat.

With the conviction of Pala and Meeta by the Sessions court in Bunti's murder case, the trial comes to an end and the novel enters its third and final phase. In a well guarded, blind-curtained and bullet-proof van Pala and Meeta are being shifted to the Central Jail. Though Pala and Meeta are cut off from the outside world, yet they have the memory of their past life saved in their mind. Pala is worried about his family he has left behind him and Meeta, having no family is re-living the charm of the road outside already experienced by him many a time.

The novelist also makes a sarcastic comment on the paradox of the situation. "It is the first time that communal extremists have been punished in Punjab and that through the sacrifices of the two innocent people Pala and Meeta".

The van carrying the culprits reaches the gateway of the Central Jail in the evening. The authorities of the Jail have already been sounded about the arrival of "terrorists". Their entry in the Central Jail is essential on the very day because their stay in some Police Station is riskfull. So, contrary to the daily practice of the Jail, the usual work has been delayed and the culprits are being awaited eagerly. Two other culprits, Subash Jain and Hakam have already arrived there, but the procedure of their entry is yet to be taken up because the entry of Pala and Meeta is a must before them according to the demand of the situation. When they came down the van they were greeted by a hard blow and harsh tone and

immediately they were pushed into the window that opened like the mouth of a giant.

Two other convicts, Subash Jain and Hakam Singh were already present in the gateway. Jain looked like a heap of ailments with a lot of gold jewellery on his body and a heavy purse full of currency notes in his pocket.

The prisoner-servants and employees of the jail came into action immediately and body guards of Pala and Meeta were discharged after completing the legal record.

Subash Jain had to lighten his purse before he was allowed to use the telephone. Though he had spent a lot of money for his acquittal but he could not succeed. He was a government building contractor and he had made millions of rupees in this trade through legal and illegal means. So he was ready to spend more, if he is declared ill and allowed to be admitted to the Jail hospital. His offer of a big bribe to the concerned succeeded at last and he got himself admitted in the hospital.

As far as Hakam Singh is concerned, he was a penniless lawyer. He fell into discussion with the jail employees for his legal rights, but his argument irritated them and he was sent to the worst barrack of the jail. This barrack was occupied by the beggars though it was called 'Kings' barrack' to make a mockery of the inmates. These inmates had preferred the jail because they had no roof on their heads outside the jail and could die of severe cold during the winter season.

Hakam Singh was a poor lawyer but he was married to the daughter of a prominent lawyer of Maya Nagar, Major Singh. Major Singh knew that because of his intelligence and hard labour, Hakam Singh will soon become a successful advocate, earning a lot of money to fulfill the needs and desires of his daughter, Ravinder. But Ravinder, brought up in luxury, was not ready to adjust in a semi-urban lower middle class family and wait until Hakam became rich. She began to feel frustrated on the very first day. Within six months of deprivation she became so much disgusted that she committed suicide. Her father Major Singh could not bear this shock. So he filed a case against Hakam Singh alleging that he forced his

daughter to commit suicide. He prepared and argued the case so intelligently that the court had to sentence Hakam Singh to a life-term, imprisonment.

Thus the text clearly tells that Pala, Meeta and Hakam Singh are innocents while Jain was an accused because of his crime. Pala and Meeta got the punishment because the government of the time wanted it for the sake of saving its prestige, while Hakam Singh was convicted on the strength of skilful argument of Major Singh on a trumped up charge. So, this episode of the novel clearly states that the prevalent law always favours the heavy pocket or the strong argument instead of the truth of the case.

After completing the preliminaries and receiving Seth Subash Jain's heavy purse as bribe, the old warder took all the four convicts with him and presented them in the office inside the jail called 'chakra'. Before leaving he had given a hint to the office incharge, Nihal Singh, about the richness of seth Jain.

The office of Nihal Singh has to get the belongings of the convicts deposited, issue certain articles of daily use to them and allot to them the barracks in which they have to pass their time of imprisonment. The turn of Hakam Singh comes first. He has a bag of books with him and some currency notes in his pocket. Labh Singh, the convict-assistant of Nihal Singh snatches both these things from him. When Hakam Singh, being himself a lawyer, pleads that it is his right to have the books with him, Labh Singh does not agree with him. When he comes to know about 'Jail Manual' being a part of the books, he rebukes Hakam Singh, saying that he wants to instigate a revolt in the Jail through this book. Nihal Singh, puts the money of Hakam Singh in his own pocket and but is not ready to issue any receipt for this money.

Here Labh Singh's history sheet reveals that he was undergoing life term sentence in a murder case. This murder he had committed at the behest of his seniors when he was an employee of the police. When the murder case was filed against him in the Court, his seniors did not stand by him. Even those advocates who had been obliged by him many a time in the past, refused to fight for him. So, he had developed a personal grudge against advocates and, now, he had got

the chance to take a personal revenge against Hakam Singh. So he treated Hakam Singh very harshly and allotted the Beggar's Barrack which was called 'Kings Barrack'.

As far as the case of Subash Jain was concerned, he was deprived of all his gold for which he did not demand any receipt. Moreover he was ready to pay even more if his case is handled softly and sympathetically so he was pronounced, sick needing medical treatment and shifted to the hospital which is a paradise-like abode for the prisoners.

The novelist makes a valid comment about the situation in the following words:-

He was impatiently waiting for hearing this news. The task that could not be done by the wealthy and the powerful was done by a common prisoner. Jain felt like bowing his head at the feet of Labh Singh, but he controlled himself immediately because it struck his mind that in fact the task was done by the mercy of 'Mahamai' (The goddess of wealth) (P-25).

As far as the case of Pala and Meeta is concerned Labh Singh had a soft corner for them because he knew of their innocence. They are given new clothes/utensils and allotted better barracks.

The hardest hit person in this episode is Hakam Singh. Money saved Jain, mercy saved Pala and Meeta, but Hakam Singh was ill treated because he demanded his right which was not less than an 'offence' in the eyes of authority. In a class-society, demand of rights is an intolerable act because it sows the seeds of revolt against the establishment.

Seth Subash Jain, Pala, Meeta and Hakam Singh all are part and parcel of the central theme of the novel as well as a competent fictional device for describing the inner working of the Jail. Subash Jain, for example, serves the purpose of describing the actual conditions of the Jail hospital.

The prisoners are also supplied drugs to fleece them and to make them addicts. Gurnam Singh has been running the above-mentioned business for the

last eight years, of course, in partnership with the concerned doctor and other high-ups.

On the upper story of the hospital are five well-built rooms which are a reserved home for VIP convicts. Dr. Shakti Kumar does want to accommodate Subash Jain but all the five beds are already occupied by VIP convicts. So the doctor allots a room out of “Isolation Rooms” which were in fact utilized for some ‘secret’ ventures. Mr. Jain is allowed to mix with the members of his clan and enjoy their company. Laxmi Mai, again, showers her benevolence upon him.

The second convict Meeta is sent to the Singh barrack. In this barrack are imprisoned Sikh militants who had a very comfortable life there. It expresses the soft corner of the ruling party towards them which sheds light on the alliance between the government and militants.

The description of this barrack also expresses another aspect of the Sikh militancy. They seem to fight for a ‘noble’ cause but most of them appear to join the movement to satisfy some ulterior motive. The Jathedar (leader of militants) knows before hand that Meeta is not a militant. But he is allowed to join the organization with the hope that he will be given training in religious fundamentalism. As far as Meeta is concerned he is happy because for the first time in his life he has been able to satisfy his needs well and that too, in the Jail.

The third convict, Pala, is also lucky because he has got admission in a Kothi (Mansion) constructed in the Jail in the days of emergency for V.I.P. politicians. This place in the jail is also like paradise where even luxury facilities are available.

Thus there is a category of convicts who are able to lead a comfortable life even in the jail due to their wealth, their political position or their social status. Though Meeta and Pala are allotted the duty of labourers in the barracks, yet fortune smiles upon them because they get ‘good’ abodes due to Labh Singh’s sympathy.

The fourth convict Hakam Singh is a person who has to undergo many unjustified ordeals of Jail-life. We have already noticed that he was allotted ‘kings

barrack' because he demanded his rights, while Labh Singh, who was deputed to allot barracks had a grudge against all the advocates. The 'Kings barrack' was actually 'Beggars barrack' inhabited by the dirtiest petty criminals and beggars who did not find any roof over their heads in the severe cold of winter. They preferred to go to the jail for assured food and living quarters. The police would arrest them under one pretext or the other to show their performance. But the barrack had less space, water or food and the beggars had developed most abnoxious habits and they were suffering from many contagious diseases. The barrack was full of foul smell and no sensible or civilized person would be able to tolerate their company even for a moment. Labh Singh had chosen this barrack to punish Hakam Singh.

There are certain characters in this episode who not only sympathise with Hakam Singh, but respect him for his politeness and legal knowledge. Hakam Singh too is determined to bear all the hardships of the jail, as he is well aware of the fact that the legal system will do its best to worsen his living conditions.

After passing some time in the Jail factory as an accountant he gets his desired chance to serve the jail criminals when he is made head of a legal cell set up by the government in order to give relief to those prisoners who are suffering because of their 'poverty, antipathy of the government and carelessness of the courts (Page-132). His knowledge of law and his sympathies with the suffering inmates of the jail bring sweet fruit and within a very short span of time 'about half of the prisoners are released' (P). But the irony of the situation lies in the following satirical comment of the narrator, "within three days half the jail was vacated, provincial government began to be praised throughout the country. The State government organized a special function to celebrate the occasion".

Laborious Jail officers were honoured by blessing them with special promotions. High Court also treaded the same path. It sent an appreciation letter to the Sessions Judge. The honourable persons of the city praised the liberal attitude of lawyers. But no body remembered the name of the founder of the movement, a prisoner.

There is another class of criminals who are suffering at the hands of the jail employees. Hakam Singh took their cases in hand. For example, Mitha, Kaloo and Nasib were being tortured by the jail employees for their self interest. When Hakam Singh started to help them, the employees turned against him. When the Jail Superintendent Ranjodh Singh began to favour him the employees turned against him too.

The novelist shows a rare insight while depicting the above situation. Ranjodh Singh and Hakam Singh are one party, criminals are the other party while the third party is composed of petty officials. These officials belonging to menial classes are paid meager salaries with which they are unable to meet their daily needs. So they are forced to add to their income by snatching the share of the criminals. Ranjodh Singh being the officer gets the larger share. Criminals, on the other hand, have to bow their head at the feet of the employees. Thus all the parties make an organic whole in which everybody proves to be a slave of the circumstances. Thus the vision of the novelist surpasses the limitations of reforms and indicates that as long as the system based upon the private ownership does not alter into common ownership, there will be no permanent solution of any problem, both need and greed must breed crime and the society will go on suffering without any hope of social justice.

The clash of interests between the jail employees and Hakam Singh compels Ranjodh Singh to accept the demands of the employees. The movements of Hakam Singh are curtailed and he is ordered not to enter the office. "His entry in the office is stopped, he will not deliver any lectures to the prisoners and he would get no special concession in future" (P.197).

But when Hakam Singh started writing anonymous complaints to the Sessions Judge, it was intolerable for the Jail employees, so they decided to teach him a lesson by sending him to the Saw factory of the Jail where he was allotted the duty of carrying wooden logs, so heavy that he was unable to do so. He lost all his physical strength soon and fell on the ground half conscious. He had also received many injuries and was admitted in the Jail hospital.

In the Hospital too, he was denied proper treatment and was ordered to join his duty without any treatment. This type of behaviour of the doctor infuriated him so much that he attacked the doctor physically. But he was overcome by the staff and was given an injection forcibly to make him unconscious and was soon declared to be a mad person.

In order to bring him to book, he was sent to the solitary confinement where he lost his physical and mental health within a few days. He had almost touched the point of death when Sangarsh Samiti came to his rescue. It approached the High Court and secured the orders for his temporary release from jail.

During this period Sangarsh Samiti that had come into existence for fighting the case of Pala and Meeta had broadened its base. So, many other Welfare Societies had linked their activities with it. The Samiti had gained success in getting justice for some persons. The selfless work of the Samiti was making it popular amongst the people who were suffering from the high handedness of the powerful in the society. By assisting them in their individual cases the Samiti was winning their sympathies and building a pro-people movement throughout the country.

It is through the sincere and selfless efforts of this organization that Pala and Meeta got justice at last. The crime of abduction and murder of Bunti was committed by a young person, Harman Vir and his friends for fulfilling their need of drugs. When the cat came out of the bag Pala and Meeta had already undergone ten years of their life-term. Only four months remained for the completion of their sentence. So the High Court's judgment in their favour was not very helpful to them. In a way 'justice delayed is justice denied'. Yet Baba ji gives his correct opinion that "We have won a lot through this struggle. Pala and Meeta have been acquitted. They have been freed from the allegation of the murder of a child. Is it not a victory?"

The above events speak a lot about the collaboration between the individual and the collective. The collective is definitely composed of

individuals, but ultimately collective efforts are the only way to reach the goal. The novelist is aware of the relatively weak position of the Samiti vis-a-vis establishment. He is also clear that socialist consciousness in the proper sense of the word has not grown into a movement. That is why he depicts not even a single scene of socialist practice in the text. But on the theoretical level, the author clarifies that socialism is the only way out of the present crisis.

There are certain organizations that work for solving the problems of different sections of the society. These organizations have affiliated themselves with Lok Sangharsh Samiti. Thus the outcome of the unity strengthens not only the individual units but the combined efforts of the Samiti also. It is only due to this type of development that Samiti started thinking for the final battle.

"To smash the dangerous Chakarview build up by Dronacharya, Sangharsh Samiti started preparing Bir Abhimanyu to go to the battle field....."

With this optimistic note the trilogy ends.

CHAPTER-3.

KAURAV SABHA: - A Critique of the Elite.

The elite is a segment of a population that wields power and authority over the large masses because of (a) their ownership of the means and employments, (b) their privileged position and status in the political and administrative sub systems and (c) their specialized training in various professions. In pre-capitalist societies the Aristocracy and the clergy enjoyed that kind of position. With the advent and growth of capitalism many other persons are included in this category.

A capitalist society is divisible into three main classes' non-working owners, owning workers and non-owning workers. The elite is composed of owning workers and intelligentsia entreat who receive higher salaries along with political and administrative power or doing mental work for which they are paid much more as compared with that of the vast masses of manual workers.

Due to cut throat competition of capitalist society, individuals may raise their personal status through their personal efforts and maneuvering qualities, but the phenomenon does not alter the existing class structure. Moreover cut throat competition also prevails amongst the individuals of the same class. Thus in a capitalist society of our times antagonistic relationships (insoluble as well as soluble) between different classes and between the same class exist.

In his fifth novel Kaurav Sabha, Mitter Sain Meet concentrates his attention on the intra-class relationship of the middle strata of modern capitalist society of 'free India.'

The story of the novel is based upon a horrible crime of dacoity, murder and rape committed by some ruffians in Ved's family. The epicenter of the story is Ludhiana, a major Industrial City of Punjab. The novelist has aptly named it 'Maya Nagar' because of the fact that the city symbolizes the universal capitalist culture in which all the relationships of human beings are ultimately determined by their maya (wealth) or economic status in the economy. Maya also refers to the world of delusion. This deluding

culture is like a contagious disease that grips the whole population without distinction of class, caste, religion or gender. Even those who can never become property holders by using even the illegitimate means will not be able to emancipate themselves from the possessive psyche of the system as long as they do not become aware of the fundamental logic of its nature.

The background of the tale has been told through a well-tested device of narrative-flashback. Ram Nath a major character of the novel receives sad news early in the morning that an incident of dacoity has happened in the house of his sister at Ludhiana. The news activates his memory through which he scans the span of the episode uptill the above mentioned event of dacoity:-

Mohan Lal belonging to a very poor family of a small town gets his B.E. degree because of his hard work and natural gift of intelligence. Subsequently, he is appointed as S.D.O. in the department of P.W.D. of the State and is posted at Bathinda, a developing town during the seventies of the last century. Thus he gets a chance of making money through corrupt means like getting commission from the contractors or having some share in their profit because he obliges them by giving them contract for public works on higher rates and ignoring a lower standard of work done. Well - versed in this activity he makes a lot of money and develops his connection with his higher officers because he shares his extra income with them. After working at Bathinda and Patiala he is posted at Ludhiana where he settles permanently.

After his transfer to Ludhiana, his **modus operandi** takes an about turn. Instead of receiving bribe, commission or share he begins to transfer all these perks to the powers concerned. It is due to this fact that at Ludhiana he starts his own business. He sets up a mix-plant whose one/fourth output is utilized for constructing roads for the P.W.D. of Government and three/fourth of the raw material is sold at Mathura itself where from the raw material is purchased. A part of money thus received is paid to the concerned officers while the other part goes to coffers of Mohan Lal.

Mohan Lal is a shrewd businessman. He envisages more profit in colonization. So, he resigns from the Government service and starts to purchase the disputed land or the land of the needy with the connivance of the revenue officials. He turns this land into

colonies that are highly needed for the flourishing city. In this business he makes super profits through using this well tested trick of greasing the palms of the officers of the concerned departments. In their turn the officers get the chance of utilizing their unearned and unused money. They purchase the plots on very cheap rates or free of cost in the name of their relatives/friends, acquaintances even unnamed ones, thus turning their wealth into capital.

Money has become the motive force of Mohan Lal's activities. His thinking feeling and actions in short, his whole person becomes the slave of money. The tragedy lies in the fact that he feels himself to be master of his possessions. His business is expanding but his human side is shrinking in the same proportion. Money, more money/ becomes the sole aim of his life for which he has started working like an automotive machine over which he has no control. 'Business is business' is the principle that has become a dominant factor of his life. To achieve his goal of becoming one of the richest persons of the flourishing city of Ludhiana he has shunned his discriminatory sense of good and evil and does everything that can bring him money and more money. The position he thus acquires amongst the elite of the city satisfies his inner self the most and this very satisfaction has made him unconcerned not only about his conscience.

His business has so much expended that he cannot handle it single handedly with his continuously deteriorating health. So he needs a trustworthy person who should assist him in all his dishonest practices honestly. He finds it in his younger brother Ved, who is a petty municipal clerk in his native town. Ved is a simple hearted person who is satisfied with his modest income, so he hesitates in accepting the offer. But at the insistence of his wife Neelam and considering the future interest of his children, he accepts the offer and becomes a junior partner in the enterprise of Mohan Lal.

In a capitalist system, money rules the roost. All the people whether they are over - fed, well - fed or under fed have average mind - set of possessing money as much as they can. Only a few succeed, while the majority goes on waiting for success under the illusion that their turn will also come. Mohan Lal gets the chance and he succeeds, while Ved has been offered the chance that he wants to encash and he too makes it a success. It has been described in the novel as follows:-

“Ved’s family had shifted to Maya Nagar when Neha was born. Money here showered upon them like rain. Neelam, who was unable to purchase even the petty rings, had brought a number of jewellery sets. Any new garment that entered the market, would also reach the home of Neelam. The number of fixed deposits and money multiplying certificates were increasing continuously and rapidly. They become members of the prominent club of the city (P-219-20).

These are the aspirations that every body seeks to satisfy in a capitalist society and Mohan Lal and Ved have been able to satisfy them. But the price they have to pay for the same is much more compared to the satisfaction they have received. Before we go into the detailed analysis of the cost let us take consider another case of the success of the underprivileged as described in the novel.

When Ved shifted to Maya Nagar, his luggage needed only a four wheeler. After a few years he had every thing worth the name. He was the owner of a Kothi measuring five hundred square yards in a posh colony of the city. He owned two more plots. He was a share-holder in a number of Mohan’s business firms. He was an independent property dealer and his office was air-conditioned. Besides that he had an air-conditioned car too. His wife possessed lots of gold more than one kilogram in weight. His children had big fixed deposits in their names and he was considered an honorable and honest person in his business.

The third case is related to a very poor man named Ram Lubhiya. He was a resident of Bihar who had come to Punjab with a mason of his village to earn his livelihood. He was penniless and illiterate having no family in Punjab. But the mason who had brought him assisted him and with his manual work and mental shrewdness he succeeded in earning not only his livelihood but some additional money to invest. He purchased two-three plots in a colony of Bhayias, built Kacha- Pacca houses upon them and began to give those houses on rent to the poor tenants of his own community. Moreover his son opened a little shop in the vicinity from which the bhayias would buy their daily needs, thus enabling him to earn some profit. He also became a small building contractor and adopted the profession of recruitment of labour in factories. All this made

him a well-to-do person having some spare money, some position and prestige not only among his own men, but also amongst the well-to-do people of Punjab.

The rise of Ram Lubhiya from a penniless person to a man of mediocre means has been described in the novel so, meticulously that it points to the keen observation of the novelist and his grip over the art of describing an event:

In this very description the following sentence shows his approach towards the logic of the event:

“He gained a lot out of his venture. Bhayias labour came under his control. He also began to receive rent from them. His elder son started a shop and as a consequence whatever his tenants earned would go to his pocket”.(Page-48)

The three cases mentioned above reveal the fact that there is always a scope of earning one's livelihood at least for those who are employed or who are in some trade or profession. Mohan Lal has B.E. degree to sell in the market. As soon as he enters the market with his B.E. degree, he gets employment in P.W.D. as S.D.O. He is able to make both ends meet with the salary he receives for his socially approved and legally sanctioned mental work. But the money he can earn through dubious means attaches to him like a magnet and he tends to abuse his power to collect money through each and every method that he can employ. He collects surplus money which he turns into capital in order to make more and more profit. He invests his money in trade, in colonization and in industry and the investment brings more money. This is a way of earning money through money which is the objective law of capitalist system.

Mohan Lal's younger brother Ved has neither a degree to sell, nor the money or shrewdness of a businessman. He feels satisfied with his meager salary. But as soon as he gets the offer from his elder brother, he accepts it, hesitatingly in the beginning, but starts blackening his face with unearned money according to the instructions of his brother. His earnings are certainly less than those of his brother, but even then he earns a lot of wealth/ power and prestige.

The episode of Ram Lubhaiya and others of his community is a typical representation of the migratory labour in Punjab. Capitalism in India has been developing under the conditions of British colonialism and contemporary global imperialism. As a

consequence Indian capitalism not only remains underdeveloped but uneven also. Just as the beginning of 20th century labour from Punjab began to shift to other provinces of India or to foreign countries in search of employment, labour from Bihar and U.P. began to immigrate in Punjab during the middle of the decade because of the underdeveloped economic conditions of these provinces and comparatively better developing economy of Punjab following the advent of green revolution. This migratory labour, commonly known as bhayias, provided cheap labour to Punjab peasantry as well as to industry. Not only this, bhayias also began to do all the odd jobs that were considered undignified even by the workers belonging to the scheduled Castes of Punjab. This situation created unhealthy competition between the migratory and native labour which is being exploited by some political parties of Punjab for their nefarious ends. Actually it is a consequence of the underdeveloped, unequal and uneven development of Indian capitalism that has become a cause of division amongst the labouring classes also. Leaving home and hearth, kith and kin behind and settling at a place amongst the strangers is a painful act but suffering from the pangs of hunger at their backward birth place is more painful. So the Bhayias are forced by the objective circumstances to go to distant places to earn their livelihood.

Another trait of this migratory labour is its inclination towards crime. A large portion of the population has been living under the abject-conditions of poverty for generation. When they do not find legitimate means of work they are constrained to adopt illegitimate means to meet their basic needs for survival. They are always expected to live according to the norms of civil society but these very norms, many a time become the prime cause of their deprivation, thus forcing them to break the norms. The tragic irony lies in the fact that both the adoption of the norms or deviation from these proves harmful for them. So, in order to live they have to indulge in actions that are never acceptable to a civil society. The Bhayias, whose criminal inclinations have been concretized in the novel, are the spontaneous creation of circumstances in which they have been brought up.

Greed and strong desires dominate all the people living in a capitalist society. But only the owning classes can earn more and more money because they have capital at their

disposal with which they purchase the labour power from the market and pay less than what the labour produces. Thus they save surplus value of the labour known as profit/interest/revenue in the common parlance and this saving adds to their capacity for exploitation. Thus a vicious circle comes into being that was an inbuilt tendency towards crisis - building. The accumulation and concentration of wealth in a few hands make many other hands jobless, which for eking out their living have only two choices – either sell their labour power in the market according to the conditions of the market or to adopt illegitimate means.

The novel deals with the second condition in detail. According to a statement, “amongst twenty Lac inhabitants of Maya Nagar about 6-7 Lac belong to Bhaiyas”. Ram Lubhiya had entered Punjab in search of work a few years back and started working as a laborer in Maya Nagar. Chance favored him and he with his hard labour and tactical approach began to earn more than he needed. With the paltry savings he purchased a piece of land, built muddy huts over it and rented these out to the needy of their community. He had also adopted the occupation of bringing labour from his native State and supplying it to factory owners of Maya Nagar, thereby earning commission from both the sides. He also opened a small shop for his son who supplied commodities of daily use at a profit. He began to give rickshaws to Bhaiyas on rent also. Thus his savings had started multiplying and he began to use them as capital for the above mentioned odd jobs.

As he had an influence over his clients, Congress party made him the president of the local unit in the Colonies of Bhaiyas. This gave him some political power that he utilized to assist those who indulged in petty crimes, a tendency that they had developed because of their poverty and because lacked any positive political awareness.

This is one side of the picture the novelist has presented on the basis of his vast experience related to migratory labour in Punjab who were victims of an unequal and uneven economic development of their native State. Having had no chance of proper political training and action they fell a prey to the powers that be and unwittingly strengthened the position of their ‘enemy’. Their labour, both legitimate and illegitimate helps the rich, while their own position goes on deteriorating. In short, they have become

slaves of money both physically and mentally. This is the harsh reality of the working classes of India suffering from underdeveloped capitalism because India adopted this path under the forced impact of colonialisms uptill 1947 and after that under neo-imperialism till date. All the political parties have been serving the establishment for the last two hundred years knowingly or unknowingly, in the name of the interests by working classes nationalism development of a socialist pattern of society or economic reforms.

Proletarians are a class having no means of subsistence but sale of their labour power in the market. This situation demands from them revolutionary action, or it is nothing but sheer slave of capital (Marx). Our so called left leadership has failed to inculcate the spirit of revolutionary political action in them and they have been trained in economism through the so called trade union activities of the left parties, thus strengthening their slavish mentality towards money. This mentality makes the establishment more powerful. This is the idea that flows from the fictional concretization of the life of the migratory labour of Punjab.

Ram Lubhiya's success may create an illusion that any body with his laborious and shrewd activity can raise his position in a class-society and become owner-worker. But there are many other cases depicted in the novel that break the illusion. Pancham Dulla, Pandit and many other Bhayias are unable to make even their both ends meet with all the proper or improper means at their disposal. Ramu, a home-servant of Ved's family and a Munim in Mohan Lal's factory are suffering from the same ill fate of bhayias. Being unaware of the fact that every class society is composed of the exploiters and the exploited, they prove to be instruments in the hands of the over-fed or well-fed part of the society.

The novelist shows a keen insight into the lumens character of the under privileged through an episode that becomes the base on which the whole edifice of the novel is built Pandit, a nephew of Ram Lubhiya has adopted the profession of petty crimes like thefts and chain snatching of the women from their necks in order to fulfill his day to day needs. Ram Lubhiya has saved him many times from the hands of the Police, but this time he has been put into the Jail where, instead of being reformed he becomes a

hard core criminal. Instigated by a criminal expert he makes up his mind to indulge in some serious crime. After some hesitation his uncle approves of his design.

Pankaj and Neeraj, nephew of Ved have some grudge against him because Ved has refused to part with a plot in his name in Gurdev Nagar. His wife Neelam has insulted them by accusing them of dishonesty in the steel mill, a joint venture of Mohan Lal and Ved. Though Mohan Lal dies a natural death, yet Pankaj and Neeraj blame Neelam for the death of their father. So, both of them wants to settle the scores with Ved and teach him a lesson.

They hatched a plot with Ram Lubhaiya. According to the settlement they would pay him Rs. One Lac and five thousand, their names will not be mentioned in the incident and only some injuries will be inflicted upon the members of Ved's family.

Ram Lubhaiya took Pandit into his confidence who along with his two other companions committed the crime. But the crime was so serious that it crossed all the terms of the settlement. A circumstance of family feud had instigated the criminals to do some harm to Ved's family but the situation became so tense that it broke all the limitations. Ved and his wife were seriously injured, their only son Kamal was murdered, their younger daughter Neha was raped and many of the costly articles were looted. The detail given in the novel shows the keen observation of the novelist that the situational action may cross all the limitations of the circumstances. In a fit of frenzy the culprits did what they were not to do? Dulla who raped Neha was so much excited by the half naked body of the young beauty that he could not control his lust. Kalia did not hesitate to murder Kamal and all of them fled away with all the booty they could gather.

The tale of the family feud between sons of Mohan Lal and their real uncle is analogous to that of Mahabharata. The epic of Mahabharata is concerned with the revolution that took place in primitive communal society at a stage when forces of production developed to the extent that one worker could produce more than he required for his subsistence. This surplus produces could spare a part of the population from actual production and this part were able to engage itself in occupations like war and worship. They needed force, hypocrisy or mental conditioning to exploit the labour of the peasant and workers. The first two methods would work only if the vast masses are mentally

prepared to serve others. This was done through the perpetual spread of religious culture that persuaded the producers to spare a part of their produce in the name of god (D.D. Chatto Padhya).

The theme revolves around which the story of Mahabharata revolves is concerned with the transformation of primitive communal society based upon the common property of the tribe to a civil society based upon the private ownership of society. The name of the novel 'Kaurav Sabha' is derived from this basic conflict between Kauravas and Pandvas who had family ties and built an empire of Hastinapore by their common exploits on the ruins of so many tribes. According to the age old tribal rules each and every member of a tribe belonged to each other. All was collective and murdering a member of the tribe by another member was considered the most obnoxious sin not only by the tribe but by the murderer also. But when the institution of private property arose, it was essential to change the traditional ethics and mental make-up built upon it. So when the question of killing common kith and kin came into the forefront. Arjun refused to transgress the tribal morality and mentality. But the author of Mahabharata solved the riddle by giving a sermon in the form of Gita by Lord Krishna who was presented as God incarnate. So, Gita is a metaphorical philosophical argument built in favour of the institution of private property. When the requirements of this institution come into the forefront, the problem of the division of the family property also arises. In Mahabharata it was solved through War between the two contending parties, while in the novel 'Kaurav Sabha' the war took the form of modern law.....And the novelist is very clear about the consequences of the conflict. In the Mahabharata a lot of devastation occurred and no party actually won. Similarly in Kaurav Sabha the suffering in wide-spread and both the parties lost. The novelist uses an idiom-like verse of Punjabi to formulate his view point. **Jo Jitt Gya, So Har Gya, Jo Har Gya So Mar Gya** (The victor loses and the loser is like dead).

If the institution of private property has such harmful consequences for humanity as a whole even in its underdeveloped and historically essential phase, today when this institution has become an impediment in the further progress of human society it's fall is

a must. The novelist has built this historically necessary message through the fictional structure he has created in so meticulous and realistic detail.

With the emergence of the institution of private property sanctified by religion, there was emergence of 'State' whose primary function has been the protection and development of private property of the ruling classes. It makes little difference whether the governing body monarchical, dictatorial or democratic in kind. All kinds of the State serve the owning classes ultimately legalizing this function. Religion and other agencies that perform the function of persuasion continuously hammer the ruling idea in the minds of all and sundry that 'the State is a non historical, ever-remaining, omni – present and omni – potent agency that has been created by the creator (God) to keep law and order, do justice and welfare of all. 'Kaurav Sabha' is the name of this State in the novel. Its character has been revealed in such a manner that its real essence of the institution of 'State' comes into the fore-front-which is nothing but function of favoring the property owning classes? It is true with all the class societies of the past and the present and it will remain true during the phase of socialist revolution and its further development till communism establishes itself.

The novel is concerned with the politics of present capitalist. This politics reveals itself in almost all the institutions of modern society and the novelist has a very rich and realistic experience of these institutions. They have been narrated independently as well as in an essential connection with each other. Thus the novel is concerned not with some independent elements comprising the modern world capitalist system but with the system as a whole that comes under criticized. Each episode, incident or character is related to another and this multi -faceted relationship reveals the real essence of the system. The system as delineated in the novel has a hierarchical order just like a naturally grown jungle in which many type of trees, plants, shrubs and grass daily grow and delay in their inter- relationship and making the jungle a whole entity.

Thus this novel is a unique creation of the novelist's rich experience, rational thinking and pro-people consciousness. For the last 105 years, the State, the law and justices have been important themes of Punjabi novel, but no novel had gone so deep into the totality as this novel has done.

The concentration of private property in a few hands means depriving the bulk of the population of the right one's labor power through coercion, persuasion, plunder and purchase. Purchase is the most conspicuous method of snatching other's property in the modern age of capitalism that started in 16th century and has acquired the name of imperialist globalization in contemporary world.

Production by many and few hands is the general law of all class-societies throughout the world. Historically it was essential to free a segment of the population from the production of their subsistence needs; so as to do enable them to carry on creative pursuits, mental and administrative works of the society along with moulding the mental make-up of the people to accept the hard reality of their deprivation ungrudgingly. But dividing the appropriated property amongst its owners has always been a ticklish problem throughout the ages. This problem has also been tackled in the novel rationally as well as in detail.

In Kaurav Sabha the process of deprivation of the masses and ownership of wealth by a few has been indirectly touched by the novelist when we read that "Mohan Lal would purchase land of the poor and childless peasants on very low prices because he did it with the connivance of the Revenue and Police department" (P-13). Again the novelist has also given a clue of the exploitation of the labour when he tells that Mohan Lal started a mix plant, a factory and began to build colonies (13). All these works required labour that Mohan Lal purchased from the market at very cheap rates took more work and made less payment, thus saving a surplus that, he turned into capital.

Thus capitalist system of production, in itself, is a system that runs the production machine in favour of the owners of capital and as an inevitable consequence 'the more the worker produces, the more he becomes slave of it.' It does not mean that the owner is free in the process. Instead he is also enslaved by money, the more he has, the more he wants.

The novelist has shown at least three dire consequences of the process that Mohan Lal has to suffer from. He begins to lose his health day by day under the duress of over work and perpetual anxiety. At the age of fifty he suffers from the first heart attack, a disease generally associated with the rich (P-14). He survives it but due to carelessness

and requirements of his business he again indulges in the luxurious life and gets another heart attack. It ultimately takes his life. Thus he sacrifices his health and life at the altar of Lakshmi.

Secondly, he goes on losing his human qualities and he becomes a slave of money. He is unable to attend his wife Maya Devi who is a homely-type simple lady of the past. American culture dominates his person and he gets both his sons Pankaj and Neeraj educated in a manner that they might make easy money. The novelist comments that “Mohan Lal had earned a lot of money but by dint of hard work. He had to perform his duty on the road where he had to either suffer from dust or smoke of Tarcoal. He had also to suffer at the hands of bureaucracy many a time (15).

In order to make their sons over rich he endeavors self up an iron mill in which he invested his money plus Ved's too. But under market forces and unfavorable political change, the mill could not be completed. Mohan Lal could not bear the loss and under the shock he breathed his last.

This situation created a rift between Mohan Lal's sons and Ved's family and brought into fore-front the problem of the division of property. Division of property among the claimants is inevitably connected with the institution of private property. It was generally solved according to the customary law - a body of relatives or Panchayat solves the conflict. But it turns to be a failure in many cases and the powerful party is able to manipulate so as to gain a better share while the weaker one goes to the wall. The bone of contention between the Kaurvas and the Pandava's is the division of property. After fulfilling all the terms of the gamble when Pandavas ask for their share, the empire built with the combined efforts of both the dynasties, Duryodhan, the representative of Kauravs gives a point blank 'No' to it, despite the rationally justifiable efforts of Mahanayak Krishan. The war ensues and the Pandavas win after an all-pervading devastation of material and human resources. Historically speaking, the war was subjugated many more independent tribes and a powerful Monarchical State established itself based on the private property not only in material but human wealth too. In the history of mankind it is known as slave society. Along with persuasion by the religious classes of the times, plunder by force and exploitation through purchase got another impetus. It freed many

more workers from the task of producing for their own bread and intellectuals, fighters administrators, merchants, artisans etc. made the division of labour more varied.

In the medieval period with the development of production forces many more units holding private property came into existence. The laws of inheritance became more extensive and the function of mediation was taken by the state whose representative Qazi would decide in case of the failure of the caste-brotherhood or village Panchayat. In Heer Waris Shah the Qazi did injustice to Ranjha when the ancestral land was divided amongst the brothers because he had been bribed by Ranjha's brothers.

In modern times the written law of the State made the laws of inheritance more complicated. In Kaurav Sabha when the mediators fail to settle the issue of the division of a plot in Gurdev Nagar, because of the opposite claims of the parties, Pankaj and Neeraj decide to teach a lesson to Ved by adopting illegal course of action that complicates the whole matter and the civil case takes the form of a criminal case and litigation on the basis of which the whole edifice of the novel has been built. The division of the plot among the claimants shifts into the background and a case of brutal crime comprising 'dacoity, serious injuries murder and rape' comes into the forefront in which Pankaj and Neeraj are also involved as conspirators.

Many Punjabi novelists have dealt with the theme of division of property among the claimants, but in Kaurav Sabha only this theme becomes the base for representing the civil- judicial paradigm in its manifold dimensions exposing the structural logic of the institution of private property involving many other institutions of the system.

Amarjit Grewal, an erudite scholar of Punjabi literature has explained the problem with respect to the modern capitalist State in detail. He opines that when the modern State enters the feud, it becomes an independent party and decides the case according to its own legal logic. As a consequence the case takes a serious turn and the mediation power of the brotherhood is pushed into the background. Ram Nath, one of the central characters, is repentant over his advice which had closed the option of the settlement about division of land through the mediators, whereby Pankaj and Neeraj adopted an illegal or criminal course to teach a lesson to their real uncle. (Parsang Kaurav Sabha).

This very act is the foundation on which the whole story of the novel is built and the institution of private property shows its multiple colours.

The three pronged crime of ‘dacoity, murder and rape’ committed by Bhayias and instigated by Pankaj - Neeraj clique is not a case only between the criminal and aggrieved parties; and it is a case for the State also as the third party. The State that has been the most powerful instrument in the hands of the exploiting rich since its inception, is an amalgam of many institutions like legislature, investigative agency, Judiciary, punishment : managing body, administrative and the so called ‘welfare departments’ along with a well armed military. Through out history its protagonists have been preaching that ‘State is a neutral agency, above-classes, protector of life and property of the people and keeper of domestic law and order in addition to being an agency for security from the foreign invaders’. A bulk of the common people have full faith in the activities of the State and their faith is perpetually strengthened by the media, by the educational institutions and by the traditional ethical code often preached by the clergy and other influential workers on the salary list of the State.

But Mitter Sain Meet, in his novel Kaurav Sabha has shattered all these age-old myths and shown the true nature of the State in a class-society. In order to mould his concept of the State in fictional structure, he takes the institutions of the State one by one, reveals their essence through the concrete episodes in the novel and presents them as dialectically concerned with one another.

The Police is the initial agency that registers FIR (First Information Report) of the crime. In the novel it has been shown that according to the demands of the prevalent law, no body can enter the scene of crime, but the Police. And the Police enter the scene when even the remote possibility of assisting the victims is finished. It happens with Ved’s family and the narrator comments, “the Police reached the site of the crime two hours late. No neighbor dared enter out of fear. They went in with the Police. Kamal was dead. The other three were lying unconscious. A lot of blood from the body of Kamal had flow out. The time of the incident was not known. Had the Police reached in time, he would have survived, perhaps.”(Page-22).

The corrupt character of the Police has been shown in the novel in many situations proving thereby the falseness of the first State agency's sense of justice. Right from the menial Police-man up to the highest authority of the department all have their extra-legal market value according to the rank and scale of their designation and authority. The department is capable of arresting the real culprits if it desires, but the whole system is so much rotten that nobody cares about the truth, but the money they can grab from the case.

The novelist is so much aware of the fact that he has underlined the evil just at the entrance of the Police when the S.H.O. assures Ram Nath to register FIR. "according to his wish." (Page-22).

The Police have many secret contacts with the public. It seeks its informers, agents, witnesses and touts out of these contacts. One of these contacts is Melu, the milk-seller. He was once a wrestler who had developed some links with the Police authorities, at first through his wrestling skill and then through selling pure milk to them. The novelist has shown a deep insight into the character of the system through Melu's simple hearted but selfish design of working. Melu is a man of his word. He would never betray his clients and would do his utmost to fulfill his promise. When Pankaj approached him to recommend their case to S.S.P. who is the incharge of the crime related to Ved's family, he performs the evil - act with all his good qualities. He accepts Rs.10, 000/- without any hesitation as his legitimate fee for accomplishing the task of bribing the S.S.P. in favour of Pankaj and Neeraj. This insight proves the novelist deep understanding of the working of the modern capitalist system. In this system money rules the roost. It makes no difference whether the aim of making money is achieved through good or evil activities Melu plays his role of the mediator between the accused and the Police honestly but for dishonest objective. In this sense the character and behavior of the people at large is always under the control of the dominating spirit of the system, as long as they are not made aware of their revolutionary role.

The intricacies and limitations of the law of the bourgeois State, its procedural implications and personal interests of the law - maker's interpreters and executives are the logical outcome of the institution of private property. The lust for money has gripped

the mind of all and for all times in this system. The ghost of money does not differentiate between good and evil. Any type of character and practice that proves helpful in the accumulation of money is considered ethical. But it is feasible only in a few cases who have the chance to loot others by purchasing their labour power, or by indulging themselves in unsocial or unlawful activities or by interpreting law according to their personal benefit. All this has been delineated in meticulous detail in the novel in a manner that defies all the reformist tendencies.

As far as the feud between the two brothers is concerned, both of them are the chips of the same block. Mohan Lal becomes wealthy by adopting all the legal and illegal ways. In the eyes of prevalent law any body in this system is right if he purchases labour power from the market, pays wages according to the contract and takes work according to the agreed conditions. Mohan Lal does all this; therefore he is considered an upright man like many other industrialists and businessmen of Maya Nagar.

But this legality of the capitalist system is certainly an unsocial act that deprives many of their hard earned sources of production and produce too. The apotheosis of the right to property is thereby dashed to the ground when one observes that many have been deprived of the right to property and a few become the owners.

We have already mentioned that the Police have contacts with the non owning workers having lumpen character. This segment of the common people supplies the Police with information and evidence while acting as agents and witnesses when required. The Police ignore their petty acts of illegal nature. As a consequence they serve the system without being aware of it; and make their slavish social position stronger. This is an important insight that the novelist has shown in the character of the workers, thus deviating from the path of reformist or progressive inclinations and using the realistic mode of presentation. But his achievement lies in the fact that the workers never lose sympathy of the readers because they are the logical product of the system. They will have to be educated about their revolutionary role by the genuine revolutionaries and it demand incessant struggle to achieve the goal.

Regarding the links between the Police and the criminals Amarjit Grewal has rightly observed that “Intelligence department got the work (the work of arresting the

chief criminal of the case) done through the touts. The Police is mostly dependent on these touts for arresting the criminals..... they work for the Police because they too are petty criminals. In order to be patronized by the Police they work for the Police”. (Parsang Kaurav Sabha P-21).

So the state of the ruling classes is never concerned about or responsible for mitigating the crime because the network of crime helps it to perpetuate its rule.”

But there is a section of the people who revolt against the prevalent law, the state and the ruling classes with an aim to appropriate the appropriators.’ The State considers them the most dangerous people and treats them so harshly that they are put to every type of third degree torture to demoralize them to downgrade them in the eyes of the public by declaring them as terrorists and breakers of law and order, or they are annihilated by the State with no ‘Vakil, Dalil or Appeal’ in fake encounters while a radical/revolutionary pattern of thought considers them rebels and revolutionaries who are ready to sacrifice even their lives for the better future of the masses.

It is a long journey to be traversed by the lumpens to become revolutionaries but the source of their birth is the same. The novelist is fully aware of the above fact when he writes, “there was not much difference for them whether they lived in the jail or outside it. They lived in ‘tens’ in one room when outside the jail, devoid of electricity and of water. Mosquitoes would bite them through out the night. They were able to manage their bread after tiresome labour for the whole day. If they do not get work for a day, they had to remain hungry. So they felt comfortable in the Jail. There were electric fans in the barracks; tube well for bathing; T.V. for enjoyment and they got medical aid free of cost. One of them got his leg treated in Daya Nand Hospital. Had he been outside the Jail he would have had to pay at least rupee one lacks for his leg operation. He did not have that much money and he would have died miserably. That is why they were not in a haste to come out (Kaurav Sabha).

If this is the harsh reality faced by the people in modern system, they must become lumens in the absence of radical training and will strengthen the very reality that has made their lives so miserable. It’s why the radical and revolutionary thinkers and

activists strive for organizing the vast masses for changing the world order based upon the institution of private property.

Professor Randhir Singh has stressed that “at the very centre of revolution lies an emotional upheaval of moral indignation, revulsion and fury with the powers that be”. (Crises of socialism, P-1047). The only task is to channelise this energy toward the building of classless society of the future in which the private property will turn into common property of the producers.

This is the implicit message of the novel that is most valuable. Mr. Grewal is quite clear about the *ménage* when he comments on the link between crime and capital in the following words:-

The man is not to be killed, but to be trained according to the needs of production system. This was a new relationship between the political power and human body by disciplining the human beings through legal pressure, the man was to be moulded for the service of new production system (i.e. capitalist system where prosperity and adversity go on accumulating on the opposite poles thus making the system more crises ridden with the passage of time.”) (P-28)

This situation is inevitable. To transform it a mass movement is to be built by conscious continuous and clear cut aim.

So the Police is an agency of the class state that instead of ending or mitigating crime, manages it in the service of powers that be; “in short the law breakers began to be utilized for suppressing the law breaking people”. (Grewal, P-25)

The novel incessantly reminds the reader that the Police are itself a category of criminals. From the bottom to the top corruption is rampant through out the Police department. Right from recording FIR upto the judgment of the case the Police remains an active party. It makes alterations in the case according to its own benefit and thus gets a lot of money as bribe. For instance, when S.S.P. gets 10 lacks rupees from the party of Pankaj and Neeraj, he alters the events of the case in their favour. But when Baghel Singh, an M.L.A. compelled the Police officers through C.M. to involve Pankaj and Neeraj in the case, the Police again complies the order. Again when Baghel Singh’s palms are also greased according to his desire, the case is revised once again.

This episode is a clear illustration of the corrupt activities of the Police who instead of finding out the truth misuses the case, not only for money, but also for obeying the political elite. The political elite also serves its own ends. The C.M. needs to woo Baghel Singh for making his position stronger in the party. So he obliges his opponent by giving him a chance to make money.

The modern law is so complicated and cumbersome that not to speak of common people even the educated sections of society is unable to understand its inclinations and its procedural intricacies. So, specialization in law is required not only to present it according to its spirit but also to interpret it in favour of the party represented by the lawyer (actually liar) in the Court. Now the case is always argued vis-a-vis each party, so the lawyers must interpret it according to the interests of the party they represent. The law is the same but its interpretation depends upon the intelligence, experience and argumentative capacity of the lawyer. So the truth goes behind the curtains and the strength and convincing power of the argument comes into the forefront. The judge has to act accordingly and records his judgment in favour of the strong argument.

According to the novelist the government of 'free' India has adopted the law of 1872 enforced by the British Colonists in the interest of their imperialist designs. The law has become absolute in many of its clauses and the Indian government has been making certain amendments in it off and on. But the nature of amendments makes the law tougher for the common man as the law and amendments in it always go in favour of the propertied classes in the long run. Grewal clearly mentions it in the following words:-

Not to speak of qualitative change, (the so called reformists present in the novel) cannot even reform it (P-16).

As long as the institution of private property is not challenged by the collective consciousness of the masses suffering at the hands of the institution, it is impossible to reform it or revolutionize it in favour of classless society or establish the proletarian State that does not require any class for exploitation. The bureaucracy including law makers Judges, law interpreters and many more groups dealing with law shall remain allies of the propertied classes because their own mindset forces them to collect as much wealth as is

possible. And due to the lust for the more and more money they never distinguish between legal/illegal or human/inhuman acts they indulge in.

The novelist seems aware of this limitation of the agency of law through out the novel. He takes the issue in his hands even at the first step of the case. Because there was no eye-witness of the crime, therefore a fictitious story was concocted for recording FIR in the following words:-

She (Neha) was studying in her room at about 2-3 A.M. The bell of the mansion rang. She awakened her father. Her mother, too, woke up. The father reached the gate. Two men in commando uniform were standing there. Ved took them as Police men and opened the gate. The criminals were wearing black clothes. They had their faces covered with black cloth and eyes with black goggles. They told that they were Police men. A thief has hidden himself in their house. They have to search it. Thus they entered the house. Three more persons looking like them also followed them. Some entered the lobby, some stood outside. They demanded cash and jewellery from Ved and also keys of the Almirah.

During this furore Kamal woke up. He entered the lobby and came into clash with the culprits. When the outsiders saw this clash they too entered in. One had an iron rod, the other a dragon. During this scuffle their faces become uncovered. She can recognize them when she sees them. One of them attacked Kamal's stomach with the dagger. The other injured Neelam and the third Ved. They dragged Neha into a room and closed the door from outside. They fled away with many costly articles of the house. All the members of the house had lost their sense. She knew nothing about what happened after that?

Ram Nath had made fake signature of Neha over the above statement (P-39).

When this statement is compared with the actual event, described by the novelist, it is nothing but imaginary construct. Ram Nath is aware of the flaws, but he is unable to do any thing more in the situation, he faces in the novel.

This fake FIR along with so many other vested interests that spoil the whole game turns into a tragic catastrophe about which the novelist writes at the end.

“They have not been punished, dear daughter! Rather they went Scot free. They were punished to a total of three years imprisonment. Two years have already passed. The government has condoned one year’s punishment. He will be at home just in the evening. Let me have my due.”

The lawyer could not contain himself with joy when encouraging the culprit and his family.

Neha began to make sense of the judgment while standing like a dumb stone. She was unable to make out whether the culprits were punished or went scot free (P-324).

The police needed medical report to complete FIR., so it got all the three injured persons admitted in the Civil Hospital because “the law preferred the opinion of the government doctors to that of private ones. The reason with the Police was that government employees do not tell a lie (P-23).

But when the narrator depicts the detail of the physical contours, character and behavior of the doctors and work culture of the hospital, the myth is exposed.

Being a criminal lawyer himself Ram Nath knew the routine of the hospital that “with the connivance of the doctors the injury report could be got prepared according to the party’s choice. Ram Nath himself had got it done many a time. He got the number and seriousness of the injuries reduced if he was an Advocate of the accused, and if he would present the victims, he got the uninjured bones crushed. The wounds of the stick are turned into the wounds by sharp edge and weapons (P-24).

This is sufficient to reveal the real character of the hospital personnel along with that of the lawyer Ram Nath. But the novelist gives a detailed picture of the hospital to make it all the more effective.

As far as the physical conditions of the hospital are concerned we have been told that:-

“A table of the shape of a wooden cot was lying in the room, almost four feet high from the floor and as long as man’s length. The table was hidden by a torn plastic sheet. It had numerous old and new blood spots. Neelam was screaming with pain lying on that table.” (P-24-25)

“The injured had been admitted in the emergency ward, but no treatment had been managed to them for the last 5-6 hours. The empathy of the doctors was proving more deadly than the injuries inflicted by the culprits.” (P-28).

The lady doctor Sharanjit Kaur who had to attend Neha’s case had not turned up till 11-00 A.M. Sohan Lal, the contractor of the cycle stand is her tout. He told Ram Nath about the doctor’s fee and Ram Nath had to pay Rs.2000/- as bribe so that the incident of Neha’s rape may not be mentioned in the case.

Similar was the situation in the X-Ray department. The doctor incharge had own X-Ray shop. So, he would force the patients to come to his shop for X-Ray by making false excuses.

Again, same is the case with the orthopedic department. The doctor was running his private Clinic. He would attend the patients of the Hospital only when he gets his ‘consultation fee’ in advance.

Thus the novelist gives a very obnoxious picture of the whole environment of the hospital showing thereby that government medical services have also have become commodities of the market in ‘modern’ society.

This helpless situation of the Civil Hospital compelled Ram Nath to shift his relatives to Daya Nand Hospital. And the novelist is clear about the money oriented attitude of this hospital too.

‘The hospital, being run privately, provides better medical facilities as compared with the Civil Hospital, but its motive is to earn profit. So, the rates in this hospital are very exorbitant. Ved and Neelam were admitted in this hospital because the Civil Hospital lacked specialized services, cleanliness and duty.

The most conspicuous flaw was that corruption was rampant from the very beginning till the end.

On the other hand in Daya Nand Hospital everything is tip top. You can have it if your pocket is heavy. But the treatment is so costly that even the affluent relatives of Ved and Neelam feel hard of money. The novelist is of the opinion that “at least two Lac rupees are required initially to get the medical services and they had to pool that much money (P-40-41).

If this is the economic position of the well to do elite of the society, commoners who are a majority class cannot even dream of A-one hospital like Daya Nand one. These commoners are so helpless that they are unable to get even an elementary type of service in the Civil Hospital. The novelist depicts the awful situation in the following manner:-

A crowd of the patients were waiting before the X-Ray department. An eight years old girl had got her leg fractured while she was learning to drive a bicycle. She was crying with pain. Her parents were trying to console her.

A labourer had fallen flat on the ground when he was working during the building of a factory. He had got his shoulder fractured. Some labour leaders had brought him in the hospital. They wanted to file a case of the claim against the factory owner (P-29).

And the irony of the situation lies in the fact that “the doctor, in-charge was absent. He was running an X-Ray clinic opposite Daya Nand Hospital in the name of his wife. He visited the hospital for 1-2 hours. At about 12:00 noon to 1:00 P.M. patients gathered there. He would X-Ray one or two of those patients who had already paid the fee to him. For the other he would make an excuse of the non-availability of the films and the patients would go empty handed making hue and cry in vain (P-30).

But there is another side of the story. Pankaj and Neeraj, who were put in the Police custody where they had been suffering from a lot of physical handicaps along with mental agony, got them selves admitted in Daya Nand Hospital through the connivance of the Magistrate, the Government Advocate and a team of the doctors of Daya Nand Hospital by using the power of money and the social status they as big Industrialists of Maya Nagar and started enjoying hotel like life in the hospital (See P-188 to 190). “Law is the slave of the rich” is substantiated by the above episode.

While tracing the history of medical services in India Mr. Grewal has made a very relevant point that:-

In clear words it can be said that the system of medical services has come into existence for serving the class having ownership of or direct control over its resources. They have four sections: Doctors, capitalists, Politicians and bureaucracy (P-45).

The third agency that serves the modern system of justice is comprised of 'Specialists in law'. Besides Judges, lawyers are the major sections who work as government employees or private professionals. The modern law, being very complex and cumbersome, requires specialized services. This is provided by law graduates or post graduates. The author of the novel has direct experience of this section and depicts it in meticulous details. As the theme of the novel revolves around the incident of crime, so the lawyers (actually liars) figure in every situation of the novel.

Nand Lal and Singla represent the category of private practitioners of law. Having a lot of experience Nand Lal is considered an expert lawyer who has the capacity of interpreting the law according to his choice and in favour of his clients. But his fee is very high. Pankaj- Neeraj case is pleaded by him after charging exorbitant fee. More over he gets extra money in the name of some other officers and officials who are concerned with the case.

Singla being junior is unable to compete with him. But he also wants to earn out of the case. So he speaks against Nand Lal in a very cautious manner and wins the favour of the party involved in the case.

The character and working of both these lawyers depicts the general nature of the working of modern law. Though the party involved in the crime has the right to present his case in the Court himself, but the modern law has so many implications, interpretations and intricacies that a layman is unable to handle it. So it requires specialized services of the persons who have knowledge, interpretative power and argumentative dextrally in handling the case. They are paid for their services and they in turn try to turn the wheels in favour of their client

The author has shown a remarkable grip over this side. The novel reveals throughout that in spite of its written form of law, it can be moulded in any form by the lawyer and generally, it is shaped in favour of the rich. Nand Lal, in a fit of despair openly declares the real essence of modern law when the Additional Judge, Sadhu Singh rejects the anticipatory bail application of the instigators of the crime.

“It is foolish to expect justice from the coward Judge. These being honest man! They do not give the rich their right because of they are afraid of their infamy. It is a thorough injustice.”

Actually both the law and its proceedings are full of many flaws. From the very beginning up to the end the case has to take false positions. The registration of FIR is a glaring illustration of this falseness. As there is no eye witness and the piety of Neha is at stake, Ram Nath concocts a false story of the crime and signs the documents himself in the name of Neha. He gets the name of Neha removed from the case by bribing the lady doctor. He had himself fought a case of rape in a Lower Court where he had harassed the victim by asking obscene questions and won case in favour of his clients who were the actual culprits.

The objective position of Ram Nath requires that he must win the case or he loses the reputation that affects his income. In the case of her relative Neha too he ignores the true facts and lodges a false FIR in which the act of rape has been concealed and he himself signs the documents on behalf of Neha.

Because FIR had to be concocted in the absence of an eye witness and because Neha, Ved and Neelam were said to have remain unconscious, so it had the seeds of failure from the very beginning. What law demands is not practicable and what is practicable is not demanded by law. As a consequence the victim does not get justice and the criminals get either no punishment or very little of punishment. Through the flaw in the law is the basic cause of injustice, yet money plays a role in moulding the law in favour of the rich. Corruption and relationship with the high ups make the law more favourable to the criminals and they ultimately win the case because they pay the required price at every step.

Law is supposed to be enacted and enforced by the State to keep the social structure intact and to control the anarchistic attitudes of the citizens. In a class society not only the innate nature of the individuals comes into clash with the socialness but the socialized persons too have numerous conflicting interests that are to be checked and controlled by some authority and according to certain rules and regulations. These rules and regulations have the ultimate power in law. As the crime is the violation of law,

therefore the State too is challenged by the offender. So the State has created prosecution department. This department plays a crucial role in the novel but in fact against the State and also against the aggrieved party. This is because every employee of the department is corrupt. So he deals in the law instead of dealing with it. Private Advocates like Singla have links with the Government Advocates and the criminal party purchases them at an agreed price. In the novel these lawyers appear in the Court to present the case from the victim's side. But they either do not put labour required to establish the truth or they argue the case in a way that favours the culprits.

According to the provisions of the Indian Penal Code if there is some flaw in the FIR, or in the procedure or in the argument, the benefit of doubt is given to the culprit and he goes unpunished. In chapter 16, 17 and 18 the novelist clearly depicts the nature of the law that favours the culprits and goes against the victims:-

Neha stood like a dumb stone contemplating over the judgment. She was at a loss to understand whether the offenders were punished or went scot free (P-324).

Mr. Grewal in his book "Parsang Kaurva Sabha" points out that modern law does not permit private advocacy after the case of the victim-party is taken over by the Public Prosecution department." But according to the text this is not a hard and fast rule. As an illustration after explaining the case to the Court, Public Prosecutor Sudarshan Kumar asks Ram Nath to participate if he so desires. But he declines because he had nothing more to say (P-122). Similarly, Harish Rai, to participate in the cross-examination and the Public Prosecutor or the Judge does not object to it (P-206). He suggests that the birth certificate of Pancham, a criminal in the case, must be procured from his native village in Bihar. The Court agrees and the Public Prosecutor does not object to it (P-108).

Mr. Grewal has made another point that once the case is referred to the Court, the parties involved lose their right to compromise. However, in this case, there are at least three occasions when the relatives, friends and neighbourers suggest compromise. The compromise does not come into being because the involved parties do not agree to that otherwise there is no hurdle from the side of the government. Towards the end of the novel, Ram Nath makes up his mind for compromise but on second thought he decides

not to compromise because he feels that that would be an unbearable defeat for the victims if he loses the case without fighting (P-289).

In the novel the most powerful party in the State itself. India, being a 'democratic' Country the political party getting more seats is authorized to make the government. A body of Ministers is formed under the leadership of the Chief Minister. The novelist depicts the shifting character of the government very vividly and with its pungent criticism. The Chief Minister wants to strengthen his party's position by taking an M.L.A. of the opposition into its own party. Baghel Singh is M.L.A. from Maya Nagar and belongs to the opposition. He is ready to join Chief Minister's party if he gets the chance to interfere in the Pankaj-Neeraj criminal case as he desires. So with the consent of the Chief Minister, he in the beginning threatens the culprits with dire consequences. Both are arrested by the Police and imprisoned in a Cell in which "some beggars and thieves were also put in. A foul smell was coming out of their dirty clothes and bodies. It looked as if they were suffering from some foul skin disease. The beggars were chewing tobacco and spitting inside the Cell." (P-174). Both the brothers were so much fed up with the atmosphere that they were crying for help.

They come out of this hell when they struck a bargain with Baghel Singh. An amount of rupees one crore was paid to Baghel Singh and they were admitted into Daya Nand Hospital where a team of doctors declared them to be patients after getting the price of their false observation. Not only this, actually whole bureaucratic machine started playing in the hands of Baghel Singh when Chief Minister wanted it. The details given by the novelist are so obnoxious that reader's belief in the so called Indian democracy is shaken and the myth of the impartiality of the State is shattered (See P-177 to 187).

Judges, too, are chips of the same block. They succumbed to the pressure of the government, their seniors, relatives, friends and above all due to greed for money and more money. They do not do justice even according to prevailing system of law and favour the party that pays the price. Due to many a flaw in the law three versions of the case presented in the novel are available to the Judge. He takes advantage of the faults of the case and giving benefit of doubt to the criminal party decides the case in their favour.

The novelist has shown a balanced approach to the objective reality by describing the character and role of an honest Judge, Sadhu Singh. Sadhu Singh is an exception to the rule. He does not want to decide the case against the culprits, but the case is being delayed by the Police, the prosecution and the private pleaders of the culprits intentionally because they knew that Sadhu Singh's transfer is on the agenda. The accused are hopeful that the new Judge could be manipulated by them. Sadhu Singh feels distressed when he fails in his objective of doing justice and his agony has been depicted in the novel in a very impressive manner. By showing that even an honest Judge is unable to do justice in the present circumstances, the writer has pointed towards the utter helplessness of the individual before the system.

With the entry of Baghel Singh, the trial takes a complete about turn. The criminals have won the favour of the Police, the prosecution and the Court with the help of their wealth and intimate links with the high-ups. They are sure to get anticipatory bail and they are busy with the celebrations of their victory in advance. But suddenly the Police arrests Pankaj and Neeraj, puts them into Police custody along with some filthy beggars. The situation is unbearable for them who have passed every moment of their life in the most comfortable manner. Moreover, they not only have lost their face in the public, they in their own hearts feel humiliated. In short money and high links fail them.

Baghel Singh is the real cause of their ill-fate. He belongs to the ruling political party. But he is not in the good books of Chief Minister because he has allied with the group of a Jathedar who is opposed to Chief Minister. This situation has made him a small fry so much so that even the petty officials care a fig for him. Moreover he is a hard up and makes his both ends' meet with difficulty. The text gives a very vivid picture of his miserable life in the following words:-

Baghel Singh's political future was in danger. If the party does not split into two parties, the Chief Minister would not give him party ticket for the ensuing elections. If the party remains intact and he gets the ticket even then his winning is in the dole drums. As he was feeling unsafe, so he wanted to collect money. Both the circumstances required money. In case he gets the ticket he will have to spend a lot of money in the election in order to counteract his unpopular it. If he does not get the ticket and he needed

money for the future.” (P-154). So Baghel Singh sacrifices his loyalty towards the Jathedar and joins the Chief Minister’s Camp. The Chief Minister, too, wanted to make his position strong. So he welcomes Baghel Singh and as a consequence fortune begins to smile upon him.

Baghel Singh knew that Pankaj and Neeraj are a rich party and they would be ready to pay as much as Baghel Singh wanted to save their skin. So he demands Rs.100,00000/- as election fund and Pankaj and Neeraj party had to agree in the long run.

The episode of Baghel Singh sheds a lot of light over the contemporary political situation of the province of Punjab. Firstly in the political arena of Punjab only two parties matter, one is secular and the other is religious. They, generally shifts their positions in every general election and rule the Punjab turn by turn.

Secondly leadership of both the party is linked with the affluent classes. If the candidates from the poor classes win by chance they too shake hands with the rich and begin to make money with no scruples. Contemporary politics, in this sense, is a business enterprise in which profit is earned without any investment.

Thirdly the ruling party is divided into factions. Those who are not given good positions in the government make their own group and pose as a potential danger to the ruling faction.

Fourthly the whole phenomenon of elections is a hoax. The minority rules over the majority in the name of democracy. We knew that in every election not more than sixty percent votes are polled. The polled votes in turn, are divided into the contesting parties. Thus the criteria of deciding the majority shifts from the votes obtained to the seats won. Even a political party having one more seat than the rival outfit is declared the ruling party. The law also allows the shift of the winning candidates to the party of their choice. This choice, some times makes a lot of difference. By paying the price the MLAs and MPs. are purchased. So the ruling party is always careful of their strength in the Assembly or Parliament. The compromise between the Chief Minister and Baghel Singh fully illustrates the case.

In the contemporary period of Indian politics another phenomenon has come into the foreground. An alliance of different political parties is made in order to form the

government. In the text of the novel the ruling party is composed of Akali Dal and Bhartiya Janta Party. At the Centre the ruling N.D.A. is composed of a number of political parties. This situation is symptomatic of the crisis of Indian Politics.

Fifthly in the first election of Indian held in 1952. The Communists party was the biggest opposition party. After that they started losing ground with the masses. So much so that at the turn of the century they had only a few seats and most of them won in West Bengal. No doubt, Baghel Singh has been a stronghold of the left parties throughout the period but they have always supported the rightists or centrists and adopted their policies in their own State. So at the present juncture they are Communists only in the name. As far as Punjab is concerned the left is conspicuous by its absence.

Elections are a very costly affair. It requires a lot of money to win an election and even then there is a risk of losing the whole investment. This is especially the situation when the candidate is not elected, or his party does not form the government or the winning candidate aligns with the faction opposed to the ruling one.

The position of Baghel Singh in the novel depicts the point clearly and precisely. Though he is an MLA of the ruling party, he is not in good books of the Chief Minister because he has joined the faction of Jathedar who is opposed to Chief Minister. So even the petty officials of the different government departments pay no attention to him, they even ignore him. Not only this, he is losing his influence in the public because he is unable to do any good to them.

After making a compromise with the Chief Minister, he becomes a powerful person. The whole bureaucracy starts doing favour to him. He gets Pankaj and Neeraj arrested by the Police. And when he gets a bribe of Rs. One Lakh from them the situation again takes an about turn and the law releases both the brothers on anticipatory bail with the unlawful help of the Police, the prosecution and the judiciary shattering thereby the myth of truth and justice of the State.

As the State comes into being in order to serve the propertied classes, the bourgeois democratic state of our time is no exception to the rule.

Here I may digress a little, when the proletarians capture the State, the institution of private property is abolished but the State remains intact. It is because the owning

classes do not shun their lust for wealth and power and they have to be checked for their nefarious designs. If the proletarian State does not handle them severely they succeed in bringing counter revolution and the rule of private property is again established as has happened with the actually existing socialist states of the world.

Here it may also be pointed that the political leadership at the helm of affairs may do it in the name of Proletarian State. The Russian and Chinese counter revolutions are the examples. There the leadership of the communist parties got it done.

In India too, some States like West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura have been strongholds of communist parties, but the States working in the hands of these parties are operating like Bourgeois parties having no distinction of policy or strategy or programmed from them. In the name of development, nationalism, secularism and social welfare they are ruling in their States and collaborating with the Centre. They never try to analyse the class character of above slogans. As a consequence they too are playing in the hands of world-imperialism which is enemy no. 1 at this stage because in order to obtain super profits they are exploiting all the workers and natural resources of the world forgetting that this will be hazardous for them too in the long run.

We have already mentioned that elections these days are business like enterprise. Only the candidates having a lot of money can expect to win the election. The case of Baghel Singh proves it beyond doubts. The novelist has thrown another hint about it when he describes the modus operandi of Mohan Lal and his sons, Politicians would often come to their office for funds. In every election every political party took its share of money from them (P-87).

The Political parties are aware that they must have local leaders to influence the voters. The case of Ram Lubhaiya illustrates this.

“Ram Lubhaiya was highly priced in the days of elections. All the political parties would try to seek his favour.

The Congress party nominated him as its active member. He was made President of the Colony (of Bhaiyas) and was began to be invited to the special meetings. He was given the charge of rallies to be held in Maya Nagar. He was authorized to provide transport and whisky to the voters.

Thus the main subject matter of Kaurav Sabha is Bourgeois democratic State of 'Free India'. It generated under the influence of British imperialism and developed under world imperialism. As a consequence it never enjoyed the free development. The capitalist path of development is adopted in the age of capitalist crisis could not permit it. It remained tied to feudalism and imperialism at the same time. So, India is suffering from not only capitalism but also under capitalism and it will continue suffering as long as he is a stooge in the hands of global capitalism whose hegemony, at the contemporary stage is in the hands of USA.

The class that grew in number and appropriated the lion's share of production in the so called 'free' India is termed as middle class. It comprises many sections of population like industrialists, businessmen, politicians, bureaucracy, educationists, media-persons, doctors, lawyers, engineers etc. In terms of money they can be called **hazaar pati, lakh-paties** and **crorepaties**. **Arab** and **Kharabpaties** are a rare phenomenon in Punjab.

Meet has concentrated upon the compromising and conflicting interests of all these groups; inter-group and intra-group rivalries of these groups have been delineated in realistic detail by him. Having no moral scruples, individualistic tendencies of the most abnoxious nature dominate their psyche. The class as a whole is unable to see beyond its nose and sometimes even the nose goes out of sight. The educated employees or independent professionals think themselves to be protectors of all moral, social or legal values. But in actual practice this is the most corrupt group. Right from petty officials like persons to the officers of the highest rank, small shopkeepers to big merchants, from poor artisans to rich industrialists and from small peasants to big landlords, all are self-seekers and try to make their way to success by elbowing others aside.

According to the text some families from the non owning working class have got a chance to enter their class, while most of them are not even able to make both ends meet. The case of Ram Lubhaiya, a **bhaiya** and Melu, a wrestler-milkman, illustrate the point. The novelist has depicted their rise in unrealistic detail. Their style of living also changed after their rise. The life style of Melu, for example, has been described in the following manner:

Melu was known as 'Melu-the milkman' but his pomp and show was like that of a milk-plant owner. His office was covered with black marble in an aluminum frame. The furniture was of the modern type. There was a phone, a T.V. set and a fridge in the office.

He was wearing white dress in which his reddish face was shining like moon. He had a very fair skin and he looked very handsome. He was wearing a bangle made of five **tolas** of gold, a watch tied to a gold chain, four gold rings in four of his fingers weighing one one **tola** of gold each and studded with jewels . A very heavy gold chain was hanging around his neck.

The case of Mohan Lal's rise is more typical. He earned a bet through illegal methods while serving P.W.D., as S.D.O, of course, with the connivance of his seniors, equals and juniors. It illustrates that a large share of State exchequer goes into the pockets of corrupt bureaucracy and private contractors, instead of its being spent on the social welfare. It is nothing, but fleecing the tax-payers.

Mohan Lal invests this money in business and industry. He employs workers to run his enterprises. By paying less to them he exploits their labour power. This is considered legal in a class society but from the humanist view point it is certainly immoral.

Exploitation of labour power is the root cause of the crisis of capitalist society. In the modern globalized world it generates three forms of contradictions -- contradiction between the rich and the poor of the same nation-State, contradiction between the developed and underdeveloped /developing nations and contradiction amongst the developed nations. These contradictions are un-resolvable because they emerge from the

general objective law of capitalist mode of production -- social production and private appropriation. The resolution of these irreconcilable contradictions lies in the socialist revolution that establishes the institution of social property in place of private one.

Another insight of the novelist is also observable in the episode of Mohan Lal's rise. In a capitalist society both legal and illegal methods serve the same end, that is, most of the gains go into the private coffers of the elite whose composition has already been explained. The illegal or black money cannot be utilized for boosting production freely thus reducing to a large extent the amount of capital required for investment. The black money thus collected lies either idle with the money-grabbers or is lavishly spent on consumer goods, thus boosting consumerism which is an offshoot of economism. Though the novelist depicts this fact in many episodes, yet he gives a meticulous detail of the situation in depicting the life style of Ved's family: Ved had furnished his own office in the most modern style. He had a grand mansion in a posh colony. The mansion had all the modern facilities and it looked like a luxury hotel; Neelam (Ved's wife) would wear saris of the newest fashion and do a new make up every hour. She had become a prominent member of more than one clubs and she enjoyed the status of an elite-class woman. Neha, too, was doing her M.A. and had become a member of a religious society along with her friend Pallavi. They, in a sense, were decorative pieces of the society. Her brother, too, grew into a handsome youngman who was a considered a noticeable guy in the university. Neha was friendly with Sagar, a free lance journalist. In short all the four members of the family had adopted a living style of the privileged class of Maya Nagar. And all this was the miracle of the money they had acquired by hook or crook.

Against the depiction of above-mentioned affluent class there has been a piece of information in the text that 'Maya Nagar had a population of about 25 lakhs out of which about 6 to 7 lakh persons belonged to the category of Bhaiyas (migratory labour from Bihar). They were engaged in occupations like rickshaw-pulling, construction of roads and building of Kothis and factories. A large number of them also worked in the factories as unskilled or semi skilled labour.

Some of the critics of "Kaurav Sabha" blame these bhaiyas that they have spoiled the cultural fabric and natural environment of Punjab. The text certainly certifies that the

bhaiyas have spread crime in the State and polluted the environment with their filthy habits of using cheap intoxicants like Paan-Biri-Cigarette and spitting here and there with no sense of cleanliness or civility. Moreover the Punjabi youth also indulged in intoxicants under their influence and they have begun to pass the time without doing any useful work, because of the available assistance.

But the text plunges deep into the issue and reveals that these bhaiyas have been deprived of the socially approved means of earning their livelihood for centuries together. As a consequence they have to adopt unsocial and criminal methods for their subsistence. The political leaders of every party have criminal groups at their beck and call and enter the Lok Sabha or State assembly with the support of their vote bank. The winners would patronize their groups and the losers would strive to strengthen their groups for the coming elections. Thus the State would not pay heed to the needs of the masses and more and more people would indulge in crime. A time comes when the criminals themselves begin to fight the elections thus becoming wielders of political power themselves.

The irony of the phenomenon lies in the fact that the development of every State will be hampered by the political bosses and whatever development is there; its largest share is appropriated by the politicians, bureaucrats and the rich. Most of the non-owning workers are not able to earn their livelihood even through illegal means and are constrained to shift to other States in search of food and shelter. This reminds us of the state of primitive society when whole tribes would leave their habitat to some other place where nature's bounty will fill their empty stomachs.

Driven by their abject poverty the bhaiyas enter Punjab where they find work through some agent of their own community. In **Kaurav Sabha**, Ram Lubhiaya plays this role. He is the owner of a **basti** in which **bhaiyas** live. Some of these bhaiyas get work in the factories through Ram Lubhaiya, while others do odd jobs like rickshaw-pulling, road-construction and building of houses, kothis and factories. The paltry sum earned by them does not satisfy their daily needs and in order to add to their income, they indulge in criminal activities that ranged from petty thefts to brutal crimes like 'dacoity, rape and murder'.

Though they have been able to save themselves from starvation deaths while in Punjab, yet their working conditions are bad, very bad. In Punjab too, they are the exploited and deprived lot as they were in their native State. They sell their labour-power cheaper than their local counterparts. Most of them are unemployed or under employed, their earnings go to their 'protector' like Ram Lubhiaya in various forms. When they are caught by the police under some illegal or legal pretext, Ram Lubhiaya comes to their rescue and the money they pay for it is shared between the police and their 'savior'. As they live far away from their kin, they feel emotionally frustrated; they work for longer hours on lower wages at many risky and filthy jobs. All these inhuman conditions, depicted realistically in the text excite them to indulge in crimes. Mr. Surjit Patar an eminent poet of Punjabi, in his poem "Nand Kishore" has successfully built the image of their sordid life with realistic imagery and poetical intensity.

The critics of this migratory labour must note the above conditions of their life along with the hard fact that they have contributed a lot to the agricultural and industrial development of Punjab through their labour. Their conditions of life can be easily compared with those Punjabis who have been migrating to the foreign countries since 1849. Even now they are humiliated and insulted as Indian 'dogs' who are snatching the rights of the labour of those countries by selling themselves on cheap rates. This wedge between the local and migratory labour is consciously driven by the propertied classes to divide them.

According to the elite of the novel, the propertied classes usurp most of the social production. They roll in money and money rolls them. They adopt the most abnoxious methods to achieve their ends of adding to their private property. The irony lies in the fact that these men of property are the makers of law. Society expects them to honour their own laws. But they break the laws without any scruples. All norms - social, moral and legal - are abused by them for acquiring wealth. They are the cruelest criminals on the earth who loot not only the poor, but each other too.

There is another aspect of their life. The traders, the industrialists, the colonizers and the contractors are allowed by the law to invest and earn profit. Thus they purchase not only raw material and machinery, but also the labour of non-owning workers who are

numerous and whose population is increasing day by day. These workers must sell their power of production to one or the other investor. They produce more than the price paid for their labour. Thus the surplus value always goes to the investor making him richer and the worker poorer.

When the criminal tendencies of the bhaiyas are compared to the above mentioned affluent segment of society, bhaiyas seem to stand nowhere. Rather, they are stooges in the hands of the well-to-do who engage them in illegal activities. Constrained by sheer poverty and backward consciousness, they fall victims to the enemies.

The structure of the novel has no hero in the proper sense of the word. Ram Nath is at the most a central character of the novel that stands by the victims. But he has his own type of flaws. Being a lawyer by profession he adopts all the false methods that are demanded by the law to win the case. Even in Neha's case he has to commit so many wrongs.

Another character, Harish Rai, has organized an all Punjab Victims Welfare Society. He stands by the victim and declares that the time will come when the problem will be solved by the masses themselves. But this is 'all mouth –say'. He does win praise of the reader but only for a short time. Actually the writer does not intend to create a hero. His main motive is to represent the harsh reality in which no body can find real solace, not even the rich. The affluent elite is always in danger of the attack from the people who have been deprived of the fruit of their labour. Frantz Fanon in his classic book "Wretched of the Earth" clearly explains the criminal psyche of the masses that are exploited ruthlessly by the classes.

At the initial stage their acts are limited to crime. But with the passage of time when they are made conscious of their historical mission of bringing about a socialist revolution the only solution for mankind's survival, they will become revolutionaries, who, by their collective efforts, will establish the rule of workers. According to Dr. Dweshwar, it is implicit in the text. When the reader finds the whole system of the capitalist society unbearable, he is sure to contemplate a humane future for which only the socialism-oriented collective and conscious struggle is needed.

Conclusion

1. General

During one of his talk sessions with Dr. Harbhajan Singh Bhatia (an established scholar of criticism and met a criticism in Punjabi literature) Mitter Sain Meets tells that he passed first ten years of his childhood in villages. His father was a patwari whose salary was very small. He would get no money from his peasant clients in the days before Indian independence as there was no such custom and most of the peasants had very few chips with them. Money and bribe were not much in vogue in those days. A patwari was a very important servant of the Government. But the peasantry could not oblige him with money as it lacked it. But the peasantry offered him something in the form of consumables like grain, cotton, pulses, fuel and fodder for his services. So the patwari could fulfill routine needs of his family and just pull on by his small salary.

The family of the novelist shifted to Barnala, a nearby town, in 1962 when he was ten years old. His father purchased a plot in the area in which the poor and untouchable castes resided under the most wretched conditions of life. His father must have taken this step because he could purchase a plot in that area where it was very cheap and within the capacity of his pocket.

So both at the village and town level the novelist obtained firsthand experience of the miserable conditions of the down-trodden who were exploited and victimized by the rich and higher castes of society. This experience of the writer left an indelible mark on his conscience and it obtained the central place in his writing.

He did his graduation with a Gold medal and got second position in L.L.B. examination. With these degrees in his pocket he appeared in PCS (Judiciary) and obtained a very high merit in written test. But in the interview, he was rejected because his pocket had no money and he had no political support. This injustice, too, contributed in moulding his person in favour of the unsuccessful.

In the second half of the seventh decade of 20th century Naxalism had gripped the minds of Punjabi Youth and many Punjabi writers had adopted the ideology of this movement. Meets had written his first two novels "Agg De Beej" (Seeds of Fire) and "Kafila" (The Caravan) under its impact. But he did not cherish the ideology of individual annihilation and revolutionary sentimentalism for long and by 1990 he adopted the rational and realistic mode of expression in his third novel "Tafteesh" (The Investigation). This novel brought him in the forefront of Punjabi fiction and the graph of his success went on rising with his other fictional creations.

He was selected as Assistant District Attorney in 1977. Since then he has been working in the Department of Prosecution of the Govt. The service as government Public Prosecutor gave him practical experience of the judicial system and he found that "the law is slave of the rich and the crime is implicit in the social fabric of which Jurisprudence is an essential part". Thus with his

theoretical knowledge and practical experience of the legal system he built his fictional universe in many of its dimensions.

In addition to the above three novels he got his novel “Katehra” (the dock) published in 1993 and “Sudhar Ghar” (The Reform House) in 2004. Both these novels are liked with Taftesh through the common story of Pala and Meeta; thus scanning the whole process of justice through all its three phases – investigation, trial and jail.

Before the publication of “Sudhar Ghar” another novel “Kaurav Sabha” written by his mighty pen, came to light. This novel has been adjudged the best by almost all the scholars of Punjabi fiction. Dr.Sukhdev Singh Khara, edited the first critical book on this novel and Dr.Harbhajan Singh Bhatia edited the second book “Kaurav Sabha dian Partan” published in 2006. Both these books contain critical articles from almost all the established critics of Punjabi fiction. Even the budding critics have contributed their writing about this novel. “Parsang Kaurav Sabha” by Amarjit Grewal is the most important book in this connection. It is 134 pages long book that establishes an organic relationship between the text and the context and reveals many original insights.

The author had got published three collections of short stories too. The first “Punarvaass” (Rehabilitation) was published in 1987, second “Laam” (War) in 1988, the third “Thos Saboot” (Solid Proof) in 1990.

Thus Meet has written 6 novels and three short story collections till now.

2. The Basic Contradiction

The issue of law and Justice is the central theme of Mitter Sain Meet’s novels. With the establishment of bourgeois social order, a written law code for dealing with the issue of justice came into existence. It is based upon the principles of democracy which means that all the citizens of a nation-state will be treated equally, impartially and objectively without making any distinction of class, creed, gender or anything else. An elaborate description of Laws and their operationalization is available in the Law-code. A provision of making modifications and alternations has also been made. As the law deals with many aspects of life, therefore nature of crime and its punishment has also been explained and a specific kind of profession of advocates has been suggested. Evidence, Argument, Interpretation etc. is also elaborated. Thus, the procedure of modern Law and Justice differs from the previous one which was based upon the discretion of the Head of the state. “Vakil, Dalil or Appeal” had no meaning in the slave or feudal societies of the past, while bourgeois democratic society gives them due weight.

But the prevailing system of Law and Justice has its own limitations of class society. It does give impression of being impartial and above class-interests, but in actual practice it seldom surpasses the interests of the ruling elite of modern society. Mr.Grewal is certainly right when in the modern ruling class he includes not only the capitalist and business men, but also the politicians, bureaucracy, administrators, religious leaders, land-lords, owners of media and artists of

different hues and colors propagating the ruling-class culture and moulding the mental make-up of masses in favour of the establishment.

The Indian Penal Code was enacted and adopted in 1862 (as Meet tells in one of his interviews) by British government of India in order to serve the interests of British imperialism. After the independence in 1947, India has adopted this very code because it serves the Indian ruling elite well and at the same time it safeguards the interests of foreigners with whom the comprador capitalists of India have entered into “holy” alliance. When we contemplate over the ground reality of modern global Capitalist society we find that there is an irreconcilable contradiction between capital and labour. Capital must exploit labour for its survival and labour must produce more than its subsistence need. This contradiction reflects itself in all the aspects of superstructure, especially in politics. The state along with all its agencies (the legislature, the police, the judiciary, the prosecution, the jail etc.) is the strongest weapon in the hands of bourgeois for its protection and promotion. So as long as the state power remains in the hands of ruling classes, there is a no chance of solving the above mentioned contradiction between capital and labour.

In this context the first and foremost achievement of Meet lies in exposing prevalent state structure comprising its above mentioned organs and in relation to each other. The issue of Law and Justice is at the centre but it does have a dialectical relationship with other constructs of the modern life. “Law is the slave of rich” is the fundamental notion that has been fictionalized in his novel “Kaurav Sabha” and in his trilogy as well. The dialectical relationship is reflected in the novels when the rich make riches through law and the law is moulded in favour of the rich through money. Wealth also generates pride in the mind of the wealthy. Pankaj and Neeraj want to take revenge from their real uncle Ved to satisfy their egoistic mindset. This very urge plunges them into hatching a conspiracy with a group of criminals who would be paid Rs.one lac if they inflicted some injuries on their uncle’s family. But this very conspiracy cost them heavily. In order to save themselves from the punishment, they fall into the clutches of corrupt bureaucrats and greedy politicians. In this process they have to spend a lot of money, use their social contacts and eat a humble pie at the hands of petty officials, police touts and local leaders of political parties.

As far as the legal side of Indian life is concerned every Punjabi novelist of some substance has shown his concern with it and one or the other aspect of this important issue has been depicted in their fiction. But Mitter Sain Meet has excelled all of them because he takes this aspect of life as an epicenter of the structure of his novels, treats most of its dimensions dialectically and in totality and explains the issue of Law and Justice in the light of its class character. Besides it he also builds a people-oriented movement that vehemently opposes its elitist nature and brings into the forefront the idea of revolutionary transformation of the prevailing class society into classless one of the future. In depicting this movement he does not indulge in the romantic luxury of reformism or idealism. Instead, he is aware that only the conscious, collective and well-organized people’s party can bring about the desired change. At the present point of time

such a movement does not exist; only certain individuals and groups are handling revolutionary task. But this task will certainly develop into mass movement with the conscious and constant efforts of those who are aware of the insoluble antagonistic contradictions within the system. They know that capitalism digs its own graveyard i.e. it gives birth to a class of proletarians that must “appropriate the appropriators” to liberate themselves and the whole society from the yoke of the slavery of capital that has reached a stage of its development where development itself becomes an impediment for the further progress of society. The proletarians along with other working classes that are being crushed by capitalist, not due to some psychological reasons, but due to its objective logic implicit in its very nature, have been historically destined to bring revolutionary change. But capitalism creates only objective conditions, the subjective conditions i.e. the human side will come into being by constantly preaching and practicing revolutionary struggle. This is exactly the aim the novels of Mitter Sain Meet accomplish.

3. The Basic Issue

The issue of Law and Justice falls in the domain of state. The state is a specific institution that comes into existence along with class society with a purpose to safeguard the interests of the ruling classes which are the owning classes too. History of the development of class society and state proves it beyond doubt that in a slave society the state served the class of slave owners; in feudal society the class of feudal lords and in capitalist society the class of capitalists is being served.

In a class-society there are middle classes too who are owner-workers, traders, artisans and peasants etc. Moreover in these classes the police, the army, the administration, religious leaders, social workers and politicians of different hues and colors are also included. Though they are not the direct exploiters of surplus labour of workers, yet they are paid either from the coffers of the state or from the pockets of the workers directly in the form of subscription of charity. Here it may also be mentioned that the money belonging to the state is nothing but the surplus labour of the non-owning or semi-owning sections of workers comprising wage-labour, peasantry and artisans. The State levies taxes on the whole populace, raises loans from the natives and foreigners, earns profits from State-owned industries and business houses or sells its assets in the open market. In emergency the state may confiscate the personal and private property of the citizens forcibly or persuasively in the name of national interest.

As opposed to the slave or feudal states of the past modern bourgeois state is run by the government elected by the representatives of all adults of the nation who are given the right to vote or those who fight elections to the assembly or parliament under particular conditions laid down in the Election Law. But the actual practice of election process violates all these rules under one pretext or the other. As a consequence most of the members of legislative assemblies or parliament are elected from the propertied classes, those who win due to their social reputation and those who join some political party belonging to this or that

wealthy section of the society. In this way it makes no difference whether the party is religious, secular or the left. In the prevalent political scenario every winner wants to be near the governing benches if he gets the chance, socio-ethical considerations stand nowhere in the way.

Meet seems to be fully aware of this election-game played by the political parties or persons these days. He narrates or describes this dismal picture in his novels so vividly that the reader would feel fully disappointed with the so called general elections held in India's democratic republic.

The bail application of Pala and Meeta is moved in the court by Sangarsh Samiti. After hearing the argument of the advocates and evidence from the witnesses the judge decides to sanction bail to the accused. But before he declares his judgment, a lawyer, Sant Ram Bhandari, enters the court-room with his assistants carrying a heap of law books. Moreover, some workers of B.J.P. raise slogans in the court yard against the accused. Under the pressure of this situation the judge rejects the bail application thus proving the idea that the law always bows at the altar of the politics of the rich.

The novelist builds another point here. The same judge accepts the bail of communal militants whose crime is harsher. The judge is under the fear of militants and the government wants to deal with militants leniently. (After all communal militancy also serves the establishment by dividing the public on religious basis)

Again, the case of Pala and Meeta is presented before another Sessions Judge, Mota Singh, for the final judgment. The falseness of the whole case is proved beyond doubt. Mota Singh's conscience motivates him to acquit the culprits. But before the judgment is pronounced a person from his benefactor, Shingara Singh, an honorable justice of High Court, delivers a message that they have to be convicted and this is done by him though with a heavy heart.

The most heinous and horrible offence committed by the government is related to the central storyline that runs through the whole trilogy. The abduction and the murder of Bunty, the grandson of an influential social worker of the home-town of the Chief Minister may badly effect his future prospects. The public of the town wants to get the culprits arrested. The Chief Minister, in order to save himself from the wrath of the public, orders the police to arrest the culprits before Bunty's last rites of death are performed. But the police does not succeed. So, in order to save their skin, the department enacts a drama and two innocent persons, Pala and Meeta, are declared to be the culprits. The drama enacted by the police is so ridiculous that it itself becomes a proof of the lie of the police. But the workers of the Bharti Janta Party and the Chief Minister along with the Akali Party took it to be a truth. By the time when Lok Sangarsh Samiti revealed the facts to the public their excitement had cooled, though it made no effect on the fate of two innocent and poor persons.

Shingara Singh has been instructed by the government to get the needful done by Mota Singh and Mota Singh did it, even against his conscience. Thus the alliance between the judiciary and the government comes to light, thereby breaking the myth of independent judiciary. This episode proves that the principle

of *'Vakil, Dalil and Appeal'* (Advocacy, Argument and Appeal) has no substance if the government wants otherwise.

In 'Sudhar Ghar' the third book of the trilogy, the cat comes out of bag. The real culprits of Bunty's case were found and recognized. He was Harman Bir, son of a mill-owner, who had committed the crime in order to get ransom. When his demand was not accepted, he and his two accomplices killed Bunty and threw away the corpse near the brick kiln.

This situation becomes a riddle for the government. The judiciary had already declared Pala and Meeta as convicts about ten years back. It was not possible for the government to reopen the case now as this would bring bad name to it. On the other hand Sangarsh Samiti is pushing the case with all its might because not only Pala and Meeta would be able to live like innocent people in the society, the prestige of the Samiti would also enhance. So the Samiti brought the reality before the public and Pala and Meeta had to be released by the government before their term expired.

The most obnoxious character of the Indian capitalist State is manifested in "KAURAV SABHA" in a very subtle, satirical and systematic manner. The name of the novel is a symbol of the anti law and anti justice nature of slave-society of the age of the Mahabharat. The State of Hastinapur was built by the combined exploits of Kauravas and Pandavas. They subjugated tribal democracies and many small states to establish a '*Chakarvarti*' Raj. But when the question of division arose, a family feud erupted and a war was fought in which so many people participated and passed away. Finally Pandavas won the war and they established a slave state on the vast territory of India called Bharat.

The author of 'Kaurav Sabha' took the clue from this epic and transformed it into an epic of modern society. The name of the novel denotes the 'State' while 'Maya Nagar' the site of the event represents 'Money dominating society'. Thus the novelist is aware of the alliance between the state and the money. "Law is the slave of the rich" and "the victorious loses while the defeated is dead" These two tenets have been fictionalized in the novel most truly and subtly.

Money has been absolute monarch of modern capitalist state. Money-owning classes invest lavishly to win the election and control the state through their candidates. The State, in turn, not only enacts and maneuvers 'the Law' in favour of the capitalist property it also yields rich crops of profits for them through issuing quotas, licences, contracts, concessions and subsidies.

It makes no difference to the establishment as a whole with the change of the ruling party, though individual interests are affected. For example, "free" India has been under the rule of Congress, Bhartiya Janta Party and a coalition of a number of political parties by turn. But the character and conduct of the capitalist state has remained the same. Even under the rule of left parties no dent has been made in the class structure of the state. The case of Bengal government is a solid proof of the failure of the left.

The right of owning property and its utilization as capital is considered as most sacred right in the constitution of modern state. The state protects this right with all its might. But the very right creates a paradox in practice. As the state

allows competition in the market, the small capitalists must go to the wall ultimately. Thus concentration and centralization of property goes on increasing on one pole and poverty and penury on the other pole. In short the very law that protects the right to property snatches it from the many in favour of a few. Maya Nagar, in *Kaurav Sabha*, represents it amply in concrete terms.

In developing countries like India, where capitalist development is in the hands of the monopoly capital-indigenous as well as foreign the process is rather slow. But under the impact of global imperialism, it is accelerating day by day.

This type of alliance between economy and politics has been shown in '*Kaurav Sabha*' with a deep understanding of objective reality and without any type of sentimental approach to the issue. For instance, an M.P. from Maya Nagar gets allotment of, at least, three petrol pumps to be installed in the city by using his political influence. Similarly, an M.L.A. from Maya Nagar gets forty lack rupees in a judicial case by shifting his loyalty towards the Chief Minister of the State.

Secondly, in this novel a political crisis of Indian politics has been shown. From last 3-4 decades, every political party has been losing its influence on the voters. So the government comes into being with the alliance of more than two parties. A type of horse-trading is followed in politics. The winners of elections are always ready to sell themselves in the open market. This situation makes the government unstable and the party in power is always busy to save its own skin. The Chief Minister of Punjab is constrained to purchase an Akali M.L.A. due to his shaky position and the M.L.A. requires money and power in his constituency. So, both come close to each other as their interests demand it. While describing this situation, the novelist does not indulge in futile moralism or reformism; rather he prefers to convey the actual political scenario of the state.

The ruling classes boast that "India is the largest democracy where majority rules the country". But it is a sheer hoax having no objective reality. Majority in a modern type of democracy depends upon the number of seats a party wins, as the votes are divided among many parties, therefore no party gets verdict in its favour from the majority voters and yet the party is considered in majority. Factionalism is always present in every party; the ignored are always opposed to the faction in power. So, the ruling minority uses all its power to keep itself in power, totally forgetting its duties towards the welfare of the people.

A specific category of experts, called lawyers, has come into being to deal with the issue of 'Law and Justice' as it has become a very cumbersome, complex and complicated business. In theory a lawyer is expected to interpret 'Law' in favour of justice, but in practice he works for earning more and more money which is the general trend of modern capitalist society. As his earnings are directly proportional to his reputation as a successful lawyer he would shun all the moral, social and legal considerations and indulge in all the evil doings required for victory in the court. The novelist has described various tactics of lawyers in this connection lucidly and objectively. For instance, S.R. Bhandari develops his contacts with the judges by offering them rent free accommodation (and this is readily accepted by the judges), Nand Lal extracts money from pockets of his

clients in, the name of the powerful bureaucrats and politicians. Even the government advocates are not ready to do their duty without being bribed as is the case with an Assistant District Attorney, Surinder Kumar.

The novelist has shown a rare insight while describing the case of Ram Nath. In order to save the 'honour' of her niece, Neha, he hides the facts of her rape in the F.I.R. and for it he has no bribe the government doctor. But in order to win the case of his rapist client, he shamelessly asks shameful questions from the victim of this sexual assault. The question of 'law and justice' in this episode takes the back seat.

The case of another advocate Mohanji, is a bit different, Mohanji is not a very witty and bold advocate. He practices in a lower court and in order to win the cases he uses his information regarding informants, touts and witnesses which he has collected with his own labourious efforts. Gurmeet Singh persuades him to use this information in favour of Pala and Meeta in the court of the Sessions Judge. This persuasion makes him bold and seeing future prospects of his practice bright, he appears in the court and exposes the actual antecedents of professional witnesses, thus weakening the case of the prosecution. (It is another story that the case is defeated because the government wanted so and the ambition of Mohanji remains unfulfilled.)

The episode of Pyare Lal is more typical. In spite of his poor family condition, he passes his L.L.B. getting first class first, by dint of his hard labour and natural talent. But he finds no work because of his lowly position in society. The senior lawyers are not ready to take him even as their assistant. This circumstance frustrates him so much that he becomes a wreck and turns into a lumpen proletarian. Here too Gurmeet Singh comes to his rescue and Pyare Lal attaches himself with the case of Pala and Meeta due to his persuasion.

Being a very brilliant person he argues so strongly that even the Sessions Judge appreciates his talent. But all his talent goes waste, because the Sessions Judge has to decide the case in favour of the government and Pyare Lal's hopes are shattered. This hopeless situation inspires him to become a member of the Sangarsh Samiti. Thus the episode reveals the fact that those who do not succeed in class-ridden society may also join a pro-people organization, if advised correctly.

The novelist has built Hakam Singh, another lawyer, as a hero. He has been awarded life-long imprisonment by declaring him killer of his own life though he is totally innocent. So he decided to help the jail inmates. But when his mission begins to reveal the corrupt character of the employees of the jail, he became an eye sore for them. He is put into solitary confinement by the jail functionaries where he would have met his death but for the timely help of Sangarsh Samiti. Ultimately he also adopts the mission of the Samiti and with a new vigour takes his unfinished work in his hands.

All the above mentioned cases reveal the truth that those who do not get what they deserve in a society based upon exploitation and repression may become a force for the bright future, if guided properly.

The novelist is also of the opinion that though the mainstream thinking is pro-establishment, yet there has always been a scope even for the successful to go anti-establishment under the impact of persuading circumstances. Baba Gurdit Singh and Gurmeet Singh are moved their conscience and devote their lives for pro-people Lok Sangarsh Samiti that is devoted to the cause of building socialist system. The Samiti is growing stronger day by day though at this juncture it is not enough strong to defeat the enemies of the people.

Taking so many characters from the same category of intelligentsia does not mean repetition. It is rather a fictional method to underline the “individuality” of community and it represents objective reality, experienced and contemplated by the author. He has used this method for depicting characters from other categories like police, judges, doctors, jail personnel and many others too. This type of depiction speaks of the novelist as having rich experience as well as his grip on reality.

This episodic structure of his fiction delineates the vertical as well as horizontal relationship among the fictional persona of his novels. For instance, the reader finds the characters of the police vertically related to each other right from the sentry to the highest rank of D.I.G. horizontally, too, there are many characters having the same rank. These characters are linked with different family backgrounds and enjoy their official position according to the authority and power vested in them by the state. Yet they are generally greedy persons who are after money and strive to collect it by all the ways and means they have at their disposal. Secondly, all of them are experts in making compromises and coming into conflict according to the demand of the situation. The honest and dutiful employees like Amin Chand and Khan are exceptional cases who prove the general rule of corrupt persona.

4. Genesis of crime

Crime is violation of ‘Law’ which is punishable according to the provision and procedure laid down in the Criminal Procedure Code. The police, the court and the jail are three specific institutions created by the state to deal with crime and to do justice in the light of available evidence and lawyer’s argumentation. But the novelist does not treat the issue of crime and justice in isolation. Rather he is of the opinion that it is based upon the ‘Institution of private property’. This institution came into existence at the time when the workers were able to produce more than necessary for their immediate needs of survival. The surplus is usurped by the non-working owners of the social order. In capitalist society this surplus is used as capital that purchases labour power of the workers who are constrained to sell it due to economic compulsions. Thus capitalist society divides the whole population into two main classes of Haves and Havenots. Secondly, as capitalism develops, this gap goes on widening. Wealth continues to concentrate in a few hands and poverty goes to the bulk of society. The issue of ‘Law and Justice’ is inseparably connected with the above mentioned social order. As the state is ruled by owning classes, so ‘Law

and Justice' must favour them i.e. "The law is the slave of the rich". The irony lies in the fact, that the exploited and suppressed are not able to discern the class-character of the modern state and its agencies including the nature of prevalent Law and Justice. The whole history of civilization is the history of the relationship between exploiters and exploited and "Law" legalizes it.

In pre-capitalist society the exploited part of the population becomes conscious about it and through its long, perpetual and fierce struggle has been able to transform the society from slavery to feudalism or from feudalism to capitalism. But in a capitalist society because the objective circumstances i.e. forces of production demand social ownership of the means and implements of production for further progress i.e. a socialist economy, so the private ownership must be turned into social ownership through socialist change in the mental make-up of all the working classes. Mitter Sain Meet's fiction achieves it in the context of Law and Justice. This is his great contribution to the Punjabi novel and the society in which he lives. He is fully aware of the class-character of the modern state and its link with the institution of private property. So he creates fictional universe by using his experience, thus transforming the mental make-up of his readers from class prejudices to classless culture.

Tafteesh is the first novel of Mitter Sain Meet in which he raises the issue of 'Law and Justice'. The novel is based upon the demand of ransom. The son of a millionaire industrialist of the town abducts the grandson of a social activist and murders him because his demand is not fulfilled due to the interference of the police. The police with the assistance of s-called social workers of the town are unable to arrest the criminals. So, the complaint is made to the Chief Minister who belongs to the same town. The Chief Minister orders the police to arrest the criminals before the death-rites of the murdered child are performed, because his reputation in the town is at stake.

So it is clear that the crime is directly related to money and the Chief Minister is interested in the case only to save his reputation.

As the police has no clue of the real criminals, it starts to torment the innocent public and fleece money from them on one pretext or other. Thus the investigation of crime becomes the source of earning for the police functionaries. In this way the novelist sheds light on the corrupt character of the department and the novel becomes 'investigation of the investigatory agency'.

In order to save its skin from the wrath of the Chief Minister, the police at last enacts a fake drama and declares who innocent persons, Pala and Meeta, as criminals.

The same story of the link between the self-interest of the court functionaries and the crime is repeated when the case is tried by the judiciary. The judge, the lawyers and the other petty officials related to the working of the court, all know well that Pala and Meeta are innocent and

their innocence is proved during the trial beyond doubt. Yet they are awarded life-long imprisonment in order to be in good books of the public at large and the government.

The third book of trilogy 'Sudhar Ghar' is no exception to the rule of capitalist-society according to which "Greed and need breed the crime". Thus the novelist describes the whole story related to "Law and Justice" in a manner that declares the whole judicial system as criminal. Its basic cause lies in the socio-economic nature of capitalism. Capitalism must incessantly and with an accelerated pace, exploit nature and human labour for its survival and development and the whole super structure must support it by creating an unquenchable thirst for money in the minds of even those poor people who would never receive blessings of Maya Devi, yet go on worshipping her. It is because of the fact that the non-owning workers are deprived of means of the production and they also lack any kind of social, religious or political power necessary for obtaining money. They have only physical/mental labour to sell in the market as a commodity that sells cheaper in the capitalist market or does not sell at all. Moreover it is a commodity that creates capital.

One thing more, the owning workers (peasants, traders, artisans) also go on losing their assets because they cannot compete with the big capitalists and as a consequence become non-owning workers sooner or later. Thus the concentration of wealth in a few hands and poverty for many is the implicit logic of capitalist development and this is the objective position for its crisis. The crisis, of course, is temporarily overcome by transferring it abroad, but ultimately it must impede its development thereby deepening the crisis more and more. The development of Maya Nagar on the ruins of small peasantry is a glaring example of the development of Punjab in independent India. The arrival of multinational companies and building of Malls in Punjab will certainly enhance this process in the near future.

Mitter Sain Meeta has described three major types of criminals in his novels. The first type is composed of those criminals who indulge in crime when they are deprived of legitimate means of subsistence by the objective circumstances of life. Petty thieves, chain-snatchers, thugs of different hues and colors, addicts, ruffians, burglars, prostitutes and their agents, smugglers, dacoits, murderers, abductors and rapists all fall in this category. Many of them are jailed for a short period. After undergoing their punishment they come out and again indulge in crime. Pala and Meeta, Pandit, Kalia, Dulla, Hema and so many other petty criminals of 'Sudhar Ghar' belong to this category. When they come out, their life becomes all the more difficult. Their names are permanently entered into the police record and when any crime occurs in their area, they are arrested by the police as doubtful characters. Sometimes they prove handy tools for the police. The police take unpaid labour from them or they are

involved in crimes never committed by them. The case of Pala and Meeta belongs to this category.

There are others who become hard-core criminals under the persuasion and guidance of staunch prisoners. Pandit of “Kaurav Sabha” has got such training in the jail. Prostitutes like Hema are forced to gratify the lust of jail-officers, while the boys of adolescent age have to serve the senior inmates who indulge in sodomy. If a girl like Mitho does not oblige jail officials, she is so much tortured in various ways that she goes mad.

All these criminals live under the worst conditions of life. Even the lawful facilities are denied to them. Many of them go on languishing in the jail because their cases are awfully delayed, while others are not released even after the lapse of their punishment period. They are denied their legal right of meeting their relatives and the things their relatives bring for them are snatched by the jail functionaries. In short the novelist has described the miserable conditions of the prisoners in a manner that the so-called ‘Sudhar Ghar’ presents a scene of hell.

Thus this category of criminals is born in poverty and brought up by the class society of today’s global capitalism. The state simply manages it to serve the interest of owning classes.

The most obnoxious category of criminals belongs to the state and its institutions like legislature, judiciary, executive, administration and so called public-welfare departments. Politicians, officers, subordinates, religious leaders, social activists, industrialists, traders, professional educationists and media persons all are included in this type of criminals. They are bound with each other in hierarchical order and in every section there is a parallel group too. They have compromising and conflicting interests at the same time and would always strive to gain at each other’s cost. They sell their mental labour to the state and moneyed classes. Actually they, too, are labourers but are paid more than what is paid to the physical labourers. Moreover, they enjoy some power and their life-style, too, is different from that of laboring classes.

The novelist has made another distinction between this group of criminals. A big chunk of this group is forced by its family duties to earn through illegitimate means. They are also compelled to serve their seniors and some time they have to suffer at their hands. The novelist makes a valid observation about this section of middle classes when Hakam Singh, himself a victim at the hands of his father-in-law, a senior lawyer in Sudhar Ghar, utters the following words:

“I do not accept the law of our country as law. It was not made for people’s welfare. It was made by a specific class with a motive to safeguard its own interest and to keep the common folk in perpetual slavery. Law works according to the social status of persons. It is a crime for a rickshaw puller to gamble even for a penny, but it is legal to gamble for millions in clubs. It is a crime to sell one’s flesh in a hut for satisfying hunger, but legal to indulge in extra-marital sex in a five star hotel. Let me

know have you committed the crime for which you are punished? I, too, have not committed the crime for which I was punished. Nobody chooses to indulge in illegal activities himself. His circumstances force him to do so. It is the primary duty of government to eradicate unwanted circumstances. If the government does not perform its duty, the people constrained by their circumstances must tread the wrong path. In my eyes they are not much at fault as the law admits. At this stage I am not trying for changing the Law. I am simple trying to get the prevalent law enforced in spirit. These inmates of jail already have undergone their punishment. Nobody has the right to keep them in jail. They must get what they deserve”.

It is religious culture that has been strongly ridiculed in Meet's novels. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, in his book “religion and society” tells that three Ps – Plunder, Purchase, Persuasion- have been used as three devices of extracting the surplus from direct producers i.e. peasants throughout the civilized i.e. class-society. Only persuasion was possible to obtain the grain when it became possible to spare it in some quantity by the peasantry at the upper stage of barbarism,’ this surplus could not be snatched from them through plunder or purchase as the leisure by class had no force for plunder or had nothing to give to the peasantry in exchange. So persuasion was the only way, in which the peasantry at that stage was persuaded in the name of religion to part with their surplus food. The peasants were told that if they part with their surplus gain as offerings to the gods and goddesses, they would be saved from the calamities of nature. So religion originated at this stage and religious persuasion was used as a device for voluntary offering from the peasants. With the development of civilization legal plunder (forcible appropriation) along with purchase (exchange of goods through barter or money) also began to be used by ruling classes and by the dacoits too. (Subjugation of nations through military attacks and preachings of a religious nature).

Mitter Sain Meet exposes the elements of exploitative essence of religious culture in a number of situations. It starts with ‘Tafteesh’ and ends with ‘Sudhar Ghar’ – his latest novel. In ‘Tafteesh’ he ridicules the religious culture through describing the life of a poor but pious person Lala Hardial. Hardial has been a sincere and selfless worker of some religious bodies of the town. These bodies help the distressed and deprived people of the town and this act spreads the gospel of God among them. But ultimately, deaths in his family disturbed him so much that ‘he does not remember a single moment when he heaved a sigh of relief throughout sixty years of his life’. The abduction and murder of his only grandson has shaken his belief in God and the intolerable agony has made him introspective. It is an irony of circumstances that the commoners think that he, being a sincere devotee, has gone into deep meditation and established his liaison with God. He may be told by God himself about the whereabouts of his grandson’. The religious culture is so deeply ingrained

into the minds of the people, that many of them started to perform certain superstitious acts for the safety of Bunty.

And the superstition dominates the minds of the Munshi (clerk) of the police station too. There is a grave of some Muslim Faqir in the police station. The Munishi bows his head on the grave and requests the Faqir to send some clients to him.

Religious culture has a political aspect too. The text informs that in elections Bharti Janta Party and Akali Party, both fight on the basis of religion. They exploit Hindu and Sikh religious sentiments respectively. Even the so called secularism of congress is not free from religious bias. The party chooses its candidates from Hindus because of majority of Hindu votes in the town. It is another story that as a reaction progressives also pull their hand back from the Congress.

In “Katehra” (The second book of the trilogy) religion has been shown to interfere in the legal procedure. Sikh militancy has acquired so much force in Punjab that even the judiciary is afraid of them and accepts the bail application of the militants under their organizational threat. On the other hand workers of Sangh too agitate outside the court for the rejection of the bail application of Pala and Meeta and succeed in it.

The author treats the religious fanaticism in the third book ‘Sudhgar Ghar’ too. Modan, in frenzy of sexual frustration, one day indulges in copulation with a she-calf. This puts him in the jail for three years. The cow-devotee Hari Om, a warder of the jail, feels so much hurt by Modan’s sin that one day he inserts a ruler in his anus to satisfy his fanatic sentiment.

In short, all these aspects of religious culture have been exposed by the author as the cruelest factor.

The novelist does not spare even the philanthropic dimension of religion. There is a lepers-ashram in the town that is run with the offerings of those who find solace in such activities. But when the police search out the ashram, it finds no valuables there because “they have already passed into the hands of the custodians”.

In this way the novelist condemns religious culture by showing both its sides good and evil harmful for the masses.

In his novel “Kaurav Sabha” the novelist ridicules a modern version of religious culture which is gaining popularity among the affluent sections of society. Mata Kalayani whose headquarter is in America runs a religious organization named “Sahyog Sanstha” in Maya Nagar. The well to do persons, belonging to different walks of life, is its members. The Sanstha has no god/goddesses, no prayer book, no worship-place and no particular ritual in the traditional sense of religious culture. Yet it is a body that is wholly religious and consoles the tension-ridden souls of the rich through “meditation”. The illusive side of religion controls their minds for a while and they feel liberated from the mundane reality of their evil-working. Moreover the weekly congregation gives them ample

opportunity to develop their links with each other. They also feel elated in the company of beautiful young ladies whose sense of 'self' is also satisfied. The society never faces any problem of money and the members enjoy picnic-like atmosphere for the day.

Neha, an important character of this novel, has been a victim of the most horrible dacoity that occurred in her home. She wants justice to be done with her and the justice involves punishment to the culprits according to the law of land. But Mata Kalayani ignores the issue of 'law and justice' and tries to console her through meditation. In this way religion has been serving the owning classes. Throughout the ages by consoling the 'wretched of the earth' with one or the other notion of religious culture. It is true that the masses heave a sigh of relief through various acts of religion, but it is an opium-like relief and an illusion of the mind.

Engels in his book "Anti Dhuring" explains the essence and function of religion along with its future so clearly and lucidly that here the whole paragraph is worth quoting:

All religion is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces. In the beginning of history it was the forces of nature which were at first so reflected and in the course of further evolution they underwent the most manifold and varied personifications among the various people. But it is not long before when, side by side with the forces of nature, social forces begin to be active; forces which present themselves to man as equally extraneous and at first equally in explainable, dominating them with the same apparent necessity as the forces of nature themselves. The fantastic personification, which at first only reflected the mysterious forces of nature at this point acquire the social attributes, become representatives of the forces of history. At a still further stage of evolution, all the natural and social attributes of the innumerable gods are transferred to one Almighty God, who himself once more is only the reflex of the abstract man. Such was the origin of monotheism, which was historically the last product of the vulgarized philosophy of the later Greeks and found its incarnation in the exclusively national God of the Jews, Jehovah. In this convenient, handy and readily adaptable form religion can continue to exist as the immediate that is the sentimental form of men's relation to the extraneous natural and social forces which dominate them, so long as men remain under the control of these forces. We have already seen, more than once, that in existing bourgeois society men are dominated by economic conditions created by themselves, by the means of production which they themselves have produced, as if by an extraneous force. The actual basis of religious reflex action therefore continues to exist and with it the religious reflex itself. And though bourgeois political economy has given certain insight in the casual basis of domination by extraneous force, this

makes no essential difference. Bourgeois economics can neither prevent crises in general, nor protect the individual worker against unemployment and destitution. It is still true that man proposes God (that is the extraneous force of the capitalist mode of production) disposes. Mere knowledge, even if it went much further and deeper than that of bourgeois economic science, is not enough to bring social forces under the control of society, what is above all necessary for this is a social act. And when this act has been accomplished, when society, by taking the possession of all the means of production and using them on a planned basis, has freed itself and all its members from the bondage which they themselves have produced but which now confronts them as an irresistible extraneous force. When therefore man no longer merely proposes but also disposes only then will the last extraneous force which still reflects in the religious form vanishes the religious reflection itself, for the simple reason that there will then be nothing left to reflect.

Debi Prasad Chattopadhyaya, in his book “Religion and society” argues there is no future for religion because the class society that needs it will also wither away. But as long as class society exists, religion would also stay as religious consciousness helps class society to maintain its supremacy. Religion generates and develops beliefs in the other world; it spreads superstition among the masses and persuades them to find peace of mind in meditation. Moreover it provokes the people for communal hatred and under its frenzy they commit all the conceivable inhuman acts. It spreads asceticism, parasitism, fatalism, submission and reformism as well as so called philanthropic attitude to solve the problem of Sin. The text of Meert’s novel “Kaurav Sabha” is heretic in its approach and condemns not only the evil side of religious consciousness, but its so called goodness too.

5. Solution

The foregoing analysis of Meert’s novels concludes that the root cause of all the evils of society lies in the **institution of private property** and this institution has reached its climax in the modern period of global imperialism. The institution has divided inhabitants of this earth into two irreconcilable classes of capitalists and workers. In between these classes lies middle strata that has a faltering position i.e. its members continue changing their class-status. Under the conditions of underdeveloped capitalism this strata loses its number slowly, despite the fact, that it cannot stay for long under the precarious conditions of capitalist competition and it will go on losing its ownership of property. The owner-workers (peasants, the artisans, the traders, the petty industrialists) must go to the wall and will join the army of non-owning workers.

If the institution of private property is the root cause of the evils of society then it follows that abolition of this institution is the only viable

solution. All the other methods like asceticism, reformism, and social welfare schemes, individual goodness- ultimately serve the purpose of maintaining the exploitative society intact. Secondly, in pre-historic times the conditions of life were so precarious that all the members of a group had to work collectively for gathering food for survival and it was, consumed collectively. There was no surplus. So the question of exploiting others labour power did not arise. Thirdly, exploitation was possible only when human beings learnt the art of production through their collective experience of many centuries. At this stage the individual was able to spare something from his immediate consumption. And this something divided the tribal group into classes of direct producers and non-producing people who would engage themselves in so many other works of society. Fourthly, the division of society into classes was historically inevitable as the society needed free hands for the development of the productive forces, for Governance and for imparting mental training to the masses in order to part with their produce voluntarily and conform to the customs of society. Fifthly, the forces of production have developed so much today that private ownership has become a hurdle and it requires transformation into social ownership of the productive forces for further development.

The love for mundane goods and services has always been condemned by all the religions throughout the world and in all the ages but with no success. It is only the Marxist approach that favours material production and consumption. The concept of 'Maya' as explained in religion has nothing to do with Marxism as it welcomes 'Maya', not its private ownership. The capitalist system today has been living beyond its age because the possibility of social production and individual appropriation has absolutely lost its viability. So abolition of the institution of private property has become essential at this stage.

The text of Meeta's novels suggests this solution clearly and this is his spectacular achievement.

In order to communicate his notion of the solution the novelist builds the story of "Lok Sangharsh Samiti", concretely and consciously. This organization is the brain child of Baba Gurdit Singh who belongs to a well-to-do family and was himself a class-one government officer. One day he chances to meet one of his classmates who was very brilliant and his teachers were sure of his success. But the boy had to leave his study due to poverty and become a rickshaw puller. Gurdit Singh was moved by this episode and decided to build the above mentioned organization to help the victims of class-society. With the passage of time the organization gained the ground in the town as well as nearby villages. Moved by their conscience many lawyers along with traders become active members of this society. The poor and the down-trodden workers-mostly victims of the police, also started seeking its help. The novelist has shown in concrete terms the welfare doings of the society throughout the trilogy. These

doings went on contributing towards its popularity. At one stage the Samiti became so influential that many other organizations of progressive ideas affiliated themselves to the Samiti: thus adding to its strength continuously. In this connection the novelist tells that not only Harish's "Victims Welfare Society" aligned itself with the Samiti, but many other organizations like Rational Society, Children Welfare Society, Istri Sabha etc. had also affiliated themselves with it. Thus the Samiti had got some power that it could employ for the welfare of the victims.

Though workers of the Samiti did not violate the law, yet they were considered the most dangerous lot of criminals by the establishment. The first category of criminals belongs to lumpens. They are un-organized lot and indulge in illegal activities for which they are punished or ignored when they pay the price to the police. The establishment exerts authority over them and keeps them under its control. It is never interested in eradicating crime from the society because it is not ready to change the circumstances that breed crime. Moreover, the ruling classes recruit criminals for their protection and give them a long rope to earn through illegal means. These criminals also work on unlawful jobs for the benefit of their bosses and serve the government in so many other ways. The text of Meet's novels clearly reveals the pro-Government activities of these criminals.

The second category of criminals belongs to the Government employees themselves. As their interests are served through crime, they would not stop it, rather they would use their power to commit it.

In this context only the pro-people organizations that expose the establishment and organize the people against the prevalent system, become an eye sore for it. Meet is aware of this too. In 'Tafteesh', for example, the police at the behest of the government plans a procession of the police personnel and 'goondas' against Baba Gurdit Singh. In 'Katehra', all the efforts of 'Lok Sangharsh Samiti' to get justice for Pala and Meeta are dashed to the ground to save the prestige of the police and the Chief Minister. In '*Sudhar Ghar*', not only the work of Hakam Singh was ignored, but he was sent to the solitary confinement to crush him physically as well as mentally. It is another point that the Lok Sangharsh Samiti goes on gaining strength because of its pro-people acts. The government also arrests some activists of the Samiti on false excuses in order to demoralize them, but they had to release them due to the timely action taken by Samiti.

In this way Meet depicts the conflict between the police protecting the establishment and the Samiti taking a stand in favour of the public.

There is a large segment of unorganized labour in Punjab. These labourers are constrained to work at the most filthy, risky and low-paid jobs. Most of them are under-employed i.e. they are at the mercy of their employers. Rickshaw and rehra pullers, drivers and cleaners of automobiles, garbage pickers, house hold servants, shop assistants,

hawkers, peons, bearers, coolies, police men, sweepers, pig rearers, servants of grain markets (palledar) peddlers, watchmen and so many other menials belong to this category of workers. They are generally slum-dwellers living in the very poor and precarious conditions. They work for the affluent people doing even the illegal tasks on very small payment.

The novelist describes this category of workers with pity and sympathy because they are not aware of their rights and duties and do much for the system whose victims they are. Many petty criminals belong to this category as they do not find legitimate work for their living. The irony lies in the fact that they often fall prey to the policemen who belong to their own class.

Most of the members of Lok Sangharsh Samiti are recruited from this segment of labour. The labour that works in factories and building enterprises and is legally exploited by the owners is beyond the reach of the Samiti. As this type of labour is the direct producer of surplus and works collectively in the factories, so its organizations are essential and easier to be made too. But they must be made politically conscious for bringing socialist revolution.

The novelist seems to be aware of the fact that the left in Punjab has miserably failed to organize this sector. The left leadership in Punjab has been busy with their economic demands only. They have never tried to propagate revolutionary programme among them. Similar has been the case with the most numerous population of Punjab peasantry. The left, working on this front, is trying to save the peasantry, which is an illusion. Under the capitalist competition the peasants, along with other small owners, must go on losing their assets. Their emancipation lies in the transformation of private property into socialist one. So they must be trained to adopt the proletarian ideology of collective ownership of the means of production.

Two Views

1.

The text of Meet's novels clearly declares that the conscious and combined efforts of the property-less classes along with the small owners must bring this revolution: The transformation of class society into classless one is an uphill-task that demands a lot of price but the price will be more if it is not achieved. Mankind today will have to choose between 'Socialism or Barbarians'. There is no other choice. Mitter Sain Meet's fiction explores the 'lower depth' of the Punjabi society. They are not the proletarians. They are the exploiters though not bourgeois themselves. The system of exploitation cannot work without them. They are its time-tested, efficient and dependable instruments. These are non-else but the agencies designated by the State to enforce law & order, to deliver justice and to reform criminals. But these agencies and their establishments produce the opposite of results. The world of crime actually thrives on these agencies. Why? In Meet's fiction the root cause of this topsy-turvy situation is corruption which is pervasive. While Mitter Sain Meet's fiction outlines the seamy side of the contemporary Punjab, Prof. T.R. Vinod's critique traces the class-roots of the present system. In his view the corrupt and the depraved are the natural offsprings of the present bourgeois system which cannot find deliverance except through the concerted action of the awakened masses. Only such action can lead to emergence of a society free of exploitation and injustice.

Dr.Prem Singh

2. The author, Dr.T.R. Vinod is a distinguished scholar and a well known Punjabi Marxist Literary Critic. He has authored more than two dozen books on the theoretical framework and analytical system of various Punjabi discourses spread over the studies of Punjabi Fiction, Punjabi Culture and Literary Theory. He has broadened the horizons of the Punjabi Marxist Literary Theory and Criticism by emphasizing the fact that literary work is always a product of complex and dynamic social relationships. And at the same time, it draws its literary structure from the same ever changing social context. So, his critical model applies both the sociological and aesthetical standards to the study of literature.

In the present work, he has applied his Marxist ideology in the analysis of the State and its various organs and produced a critique of novels of Mitter Sain Meet.

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