

**Socio-Cultural Concerns in Ajmer Singh Aulakh's
Sat Begane and Gurdial Singh's *Night of the Half Moon***

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by

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CERTIFICATE

I declare that the dissertation entitled “Socio-Cultural Concerns in Ajmer Singh Aulakh’s *Sat Begane* and Gurdial Singh’s *Night of the Half Moon*” has been prepared by me under the guidance of Prof. Paramjit Singh Ramana, Dean, School of Languages, Literature and Culture and Dr. Amandeep Singh, Assistant Professor, Centre for Comparative Literature, Central University of Punjab. No part of this dissertation has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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CERTIFICATE

We certify that Amandeep Kaur has prepared her dissertation entitled “Socio-Cultural Concerns in Ajmer Singh Aulakh’s *Sat Begane* and Gurdial Singh’s *Night of the Half Moon*”, for the award of M.Phil. degree of the Central University of Punjab, under our guidance. She has carried out this work at the Centre for Comparative Literature, School of Languages, Literature and Culture, Central University of Punjab.

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ABSTRACT

Socio-Cultural Concerns in Ajmer Singh Aulakh's *Sat Begane* and Gurdial Singh's *Night of the Half Moon*

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Ajmer Singh Aulakh and Gurdial Singh are two prominent Punjabi writers who belong to the Malwa region of Punjab. Both the writers portray the everyday realities of marginalised people especially small or landless farmers. Commercialisation of agriculture under the Green Revolution has changed the socio-cultural environment of Punjab considerably, and these changes get reflected in vernacular literature also. In this study, comparative analysis of writings of these two writers has been done so as to analyse various socio-cultural concerns present in their texts. Both the writers belong to a relatively backward area of Punjab, and have focused on small farmers. These texts show complexities of rural agricultural life where land is both the main source of all livelihood and is also cause of many disputes. Due to its power to make or break the future of a family, hold over land becomes an issue of life and death. This over-reliance over land distorts the personal and familial life, in which women are the main sufferers. This socio-economic situation gets compounded with the addition of feelings of revenge, honour etc. which draw their strength from the cultural milieu. *Sat Begane* and *Night of the Half Moon* under study portray this complex reality of Punjabi farming community. The focus of this study is on the complex socio-cultural factors and economic transformation of the region that has deeply affected the human relationships and value system during this period.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The socio-cultural context plays a very important role in the construction of a literary text and also in its consumption. Serious and socially conscious writers like Gurdial Singh and Ajmer Singh Aulakh take not only their thematic concerns but also the minor details of their works from the society around them. In this sense their works fall in the category of what can be called 'realistic writing'. A realistic text is a broad reflection of social, political and cultural aspects of the society. It is important to understand the meaning of term 'realism' before going into the study of social-cultural context of literature. The word realism is used in a variety of contexts. "Realism is both a general concept and the name of specific movement in nineteenth century art and literature" (Potolsky 95).

As a major critical approach to literature, realism sees a literary work as a reflection of a society and its culture. For critics with such orientation, socio-cultural concerns remain an important issue in literature. With the changes in the social, political, economic structures of a society, themes and concerns in literature also change. Literature does not only reflect 'reality' but it also affects reality in some significant ways.

It is more useful to identify realism in terms of the intended effect on the reader: realistic fiction is written to give the effect that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader, evoking the sense that its characters might in fact exist, and that such things might well happen. (Abrams 303)

'Realistic' literature, in particular, is concerned with portraying the contemporary reality. Realism is a very complex word, "...not only because of the intricacy of the disputes in art and philosophy to which its predominant uses refer, but also because the two words on which it seems to depend, real and reality, have a very complicated linguistic history" (Williams 257).

Wallace Martin says that 'realism' refers to a certain kind of reading experience and is seen as a true reflection of the world, regardless of when the work was created (58). Depiction of reality becomes rather difficult and problematic in a fragmented world. Pam Morris illustrates in her introduction of the *Realism*, "...realist novels *never* give us life or a slice of life nor do they reflect

reality... literary realism is a representational form and a representation can never be identical with that which it represents” (4). So realism appears to be more acceptable as a period concept. “Many critics argue that if realism is to have any meaning, it should be defined as a literary concept that is best exemplified in the nineteenth century novel” (Martin 58).

In the contemporary Punjabi literature, realism is an important approach, which has more influence and acceptance in certain literary/critical circles, than Idealism and Romanticism. Punjab came under British rule in the second half of the nineteenth century, and with the advent of twentieth century, European influence could be easily seen in the culture and literature of Punjab. With a rise in anthropocentric attitudes in the cultural spheres and rational, scientific and materialistic thinking gaining ground, realism found wider acceptance in literature replacing myth and romance.

There are various views regarding relationship of 'reality' and literature. One argument is that in realistic literature, unlike naturalism, reality is not represented as it is on the surface, but as it is at the deeper level of significance. In history of Punjabi literature, the twentieth century is considered as the century of man, and this is also the time when realistic literature made its impact felt in all spheres and genres of literary writing. Commenting on the relationship of literature and reality, literary critic B. Krylov writes in the preface of *Literature and Art*:

Realistic representation, Marx and Engels emphasized, is by no means a mere copy of reality, but a way of penetrating into the very essence of a phenomenon, a method of artistic generalization that makes it possible to disclose the typical traits of a particular age ... Engels formulated what is generally recognized as the classical definition of realism. “Realism, to my mind,”..., “implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances.” (90)

After independence, rationalism became a very important vision for Punjabi writers and readers, so when a reader reads a Punjabi novel or play, he becomes conscious of the reality and contradictions of life. Reading literature creates interest for the living and reader is motivated to face the problems of the life. Novels, plays and other art forms are aesthetic creations which depict everyday changing life in its diverse colours and hues. Emphasizing the same point, Arnold

Kettle writes, "Literature is a part of life and can be judged only in its relevance to life. Life is not static but moving and changing" (12). Such attitude has been the dominant tradition in Punjabi literature during the last half a century or so. The realistic writers have their own views towards society, and they try to present the contemporary social struggles of the society.

As apparent from the above, realism is not a static and fixed category. Texts written in realistic mode can vary in many aspects. In Punjabi literature, literary historians have divided history of realistic Punjabi literature into various phases or types, because there were various tendencies of realism. Romantic-idealistic realism, naturalistic realism, psychological realism, critical realism, and social realism are some of the sub-types of realism that were used by the Punjabi writers (Singh, Punjabi 103).

The Romantic-Idealistic realism can be found in the ancient literature also. Some realistic tendency is always present in literature, irrespective of era, genre, language etc. In the early years of modern Punjabi literature, i.e. around the beginning of twentieth century, this tendency was present in some writing particularly I.C. Nanda's early plays. In the novels and plays, written under this tendency, the writers portray representative characters and situations. Main issue for the author is to represent society along with an idealistic or motivational concern.

Early novels of Nanak Singh can be seen as an example of literature of this category. His novels were based on themes of real life but he depicted idealised flat characters. Jaswant Singh Kanwal entered the literary field after Nanak Singh, and basically continued Nanak Singh's tradition of fiction writing. He chose progressive subjects, but treatment of the subject was traditional and inclined towards romance or romantic idealism rather than realism. Most novels of Amrita Pritam like *Chak Number 36* and *Dharti, Sagar te Sippian* also portray the romantic world. Dalip Kaur Tiwana depicted the traditional world and values in *Eh Hamara Jiwana* but her later novels tried to present the changing circumstances of contemporary life, as seen from a women's point of view. Inspired by such writers, later writers moved forward and started depicting real social issues in their works. Narinderpal Singh's *Tapu* and Mohan Kahlon's *Beri te Breta* and *Machhali Ik Dariya Di* and Dalip Kaur Tiwana's *Vaat Hamari* and *Suraj te Samunder* were attempts to portray the social and psychological reality in a romantic manner.

Representation of reality which was more akin to 'naturalism' gained currency for some time around 1950s in Punjabi literature. In context of world literature, emphasizing the scientific and objective focus of naturalism, M.H. Abrams writes "...Zola and later naturalistic writers, such as the Americans Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser, try to present their subjects with scientific objectivity and with elaborate documentation... (304).

A very important critic in realist mould, Lukacs observes that, "where the realists focused on social relationships, the naturalists attempted 'the direct, mechanical mirroring of the humdrum reality of capitalism'" (qtd. in Potolsky 105). In naturalistic mode of writing, writer tries to portray the reality as exactly as possible. According to Niranjan Tasneem, "Naturalistic writer does not hide the worse dimensions of life and focuses on a slice of life presenting it in a scientific way leaving it all bare and in full view" (103, translation mine).

Gurcharan Singh's novel *Vagdi Si Ravi*, Surjeet Singh Sethi's *Aabra Kadabra*, Mohan Kahlon's *Gori Nadi da Geet*, Santhokh Singh Dheer's *Oh Din* and Gurcharan Singh Arshi's *Bimar Sadak* are the examples of the naturalistic portrayal of reality in Punjabi fiction. Thus for naturalistic writers, no facts or issues are small and unimportant, and they try to present these facts in an objective scientific manner. The purpose of realistic writing is to depict the deeper reality of life in writings as well as to portray the economic and social movements and directions of the society.

Psychological realism is also a type of realism in which writer focuses on the psychological aspects of the character while representing reality. For fiction writers, influenced by European stream of consciousness technique, looking into inner recesses of the mind is more important than presenting the outer everyday life. These types of writings not only reflect the psychology of character, but also of the writer himself.

A work of literature always reflects, whether consciously or unconsciously, the psychology of the class which the writer represents, or else, as often happens, it reflects a mixture of elements in which the influence of various classes on the writer is revealed, and this must be subjected to the class analysis.
(Lunacharsky 11)

Kartar Singh Duggal's novels *Aandran*, *Nuhh te Mas*, *Ik Dil Vikayo Hai*, *Dard na Jane Koye*, depict the psychological reality of different characters along with social and historical reality. Apart from this, Surjeet Singh Sethi's novel *Ik Khali Piyala*, Nirajan Tasneem's *Parchhaven*, *Tredan te Rup*, *Ret Chhal*, Surjeet Hans's *Mitti di Dheri*, Sukhbir's novel *Gardish*, *Pani te Phul* etc. can also be termed as psychological novels influenced by stream of consciousness technique.

Since the advent of green revolution and industrialization, social structures have changed considerably, putting a lot of burden on every individual, especially those belonging to underprivileged sections of the society. This complexity not only makes living difficult, but also writing about living becomes a big task.

It is generally assumed that the great complexity of modern life and the sense of flux and uncertainty of revolutionary period make writing unusually difficult. (Kettle 59 Vol 2)

The writer therefore has a big task in his hands to present the complex reality of contemporary life; writing in realistic mode is one of the ways in which a writer can do justice to his subjects and his profession. As Lukacs points out, a correct aesthetic understanding of social and historical reality is the precondition of realism. Gurdial Singh's novels *Marhi da diva* and *Adh Chanani Raat*, *Anhoye*, Ram Saroop Ankhil's *Kothe Khadak Singh* and *Partapi*, Karamjeet Kussa's novel *Rohi Biaban*, *Burke Wale Lutere*, Sohan Singh Seetal's *Tutan Wala Khuh* and *Yug Badal Gya* are examples of this category.

One main type of realism in literary critical sphere is socialist realism. It has the elements of optimism and progress. These elements help to understand and to give a new perspective to the society. The aim of social realism is to realize those dilemmas which try to eliminate human struggle. Writers of social realism write in an artistic way to further the cause of equality in all spheres of human life. This type of novel and play depict various things like different aspects of social life, the psyche of human beings, the inter-relations of lower caste etc. Sant Singh Sekhon's novel *Lahhu Mitti* and Jaswant Singh Kanwal's *Raat Baki Hai* are examples of the portrayal of social reality. Gurdial Singh is a writer in the realistic tradition in the sense of reflecting social reality and this tradition is the major literary tradition in contemporary Punjabi fiction.

Punjabi novel has its origins in the Punjabi translations of English novels like *Pilgrim's Progress*. Subsequently Punjabi writers like Bhai Vir Singh, Mohan

Singh Vaid, Charan Singh Shaheed, Joshua Fazal Din, and others started writing in this new form. The novels of these novelists are mostly based on Sikh religion. Written with the aim of propagating their religion, these novels, also try to create awareness against social evils. From the perspective of technique, these works can, at best, be accepted as a first exercise in novel writing. Bhai Vir Singh mostly used the novel form for didactic purposes and so did the other writers. Commenting on these, Sandhu aptly remarks that novels of 1901 chose their themes under two influences. One is the influence of British imperialism which can be seen in novels written by Christian missionaries. Second influence is of 'Singh Sabha Lehar' (20).

After some time, this tendency of religious moralizing turned towards idealistic writing, in which novelists tried to pin point the social evils in society. After these first attempts, Punjabi novel came into its own with the writings of Nanak Singh. As the first Punjabi author of fictional works that could be called novels in the modern sense, he chose his field wisely; most of his characters came from the people he knew well—the lower middle class in the urban setting of Punjab. He also depicted the struggle of the worker against the newly emerging capitalistic order and the decaying feudalistic aristocracy. He depicted the life of Punjabi lower middle class faithfully and with great sympathy; his novels have well-constructed plots. In his reformist zeal, he tended to sentimentalize Punjabi society, but with growing maturity he became more detached and critical, and his writing gained considerably in power. Trying to give a realistic portrayal of everyday life, he has given voice to those who could not express their feelings and invested them with the grandeur of simple humanity.

Nanak Singh's writing period spans over many decades, and he got influenced by contemporary social movements. He also wrote during the period when Marxist criticism influence was on the increase and, in the misguided belief that "progressive" writing necessarily meant writing about the militant worker, the so-called *Pragtivad* established the stock character in stock situations of conflict. As such, the works of Nanak Singh lost their storytelling charm and were reduced to mere communist propaganda. He consciously tried to free himself of this impeding influence in his later works.

After Nanak Singh, realism got its first big exponent in the form of Surinder Singh Narula. His first novel, *Peo Putter*, is widely accepted as a major work of

realistic fiction in Punjabi language. In another novel, *Lok Dushman*, he attempts to depict the conflict between the feudal lords and the peasants. Narula, in short, is responsible for introducing social realism in Punjabi fiction supported by documentation of facts. But, as a result, his novels turned into more or less dry accounts of social and historical facts. Another feature of his works is that it shifted the domestic scene to which the Punjabi novel was confined earlier and broadened its sphere to meaningful socio-economic perspectives.

Sant Singh Sekhon with his *Lahu Mitti* narrates the story of a Punjabi peasant with a background of vast agricultural and economic changes. Jaswant Singh Kanwal attempts to invest a charm in the rural life of Punjab. His novel *Puranmashi*, a work of his early phase, depicts village life in an exquisite manner. In his later novels, he becomes more and more political, and in most of his novels he superimposes abstract polemical discussion on Marxist ideology and mixes the same with Indian religious philosophy. Only in *Civil Lines*, he protracts fictional interest and gives a realistic picture of the modern culture and society.

Kartar Singh Duggal is one of the most prolific writers in Punjabi literature. He started presenting psychological reality in his novels. *Aandran*, *Nuh te Maas*, *Ik Dil Vikayo Hai*, *Dard Na Jane Koye* are his famous novels. Sukhbir is the first novelist in Punjabi literature who has portrayed successfully, the life style of metropolitan cities.

Dalip Kaur Tiwana, who started writing in the early 1960s, has published more than half a dozen novels, but her most outstanding work till now remains *Eh Hamara Jiwana*, a very moving tale of a poor peasant girl who becomes a victim of reckless human lust. It narrates the tragedy of a woman belonging to a landless peasant family who despite her best efforts to preserve herself, becomes victim to circumstances in which she and her family remain caught. Tiwana used the regional dialect of Malwa in this novel for expressing inner feelings with minimum use of words.

The subject of progressive novels was different from earlier novels. In these novels, along with the reality of the different regions of Punjab, plight of common man was presented with respect to his surroundings. At this time, some writers also tried to write experimental-realistic novels. Issues of metropolitan life style, urbanization, gender troubles etc. were foregrounded in these types of writings. The novels dealing with such issues enjoy great importance in the history of

Punjabi literature. The novels of Sukhbir deal with the middle class family and life in big cities. The characters of these novels are selected from different areas of society.

These novelists portray all these issues through the different situation of their characters. Then the main character tries to end the problems but instead of ending the problems, the character himself is caught in the web of problems. (Sandhu 28)

After 1960, Critical realism takes place in Punjabi literature. Some of the new novelists or dramatists tried to portray the reality of life through critical approach. This is the reason that the novels and plays of this period have their different existence from the novels before 1960s. After 1960, portrayal of the reality of a common man's life comes into forefront in various novels and plays.

During this time period, Punjabi literature undergoes considerable change. Writers start employing critical realism for the portrayal of reality. This approach helps writers to portray the reasons of the problems of human life as their main themes in their creative works.

That is to say, the novelist describes some selected section of the world around him and he so fashions it as to point out the weaknesses in the structure of the society and even suggests way in which those weakness could be remedied. (Chattopadhyay 3)

Gurdial Singh is a leading figure of the new Punjabi novel whose novels portray the rural life of Punjab. For his contribution to Punjabi fiction, he has been awarded the Jnanpith award (1999); the highest honour for creative writing in India. The publication of his *Marhi da Diva* marks the beginning of a new era of the Punjabi novel. It brings out in a significant manner the rural cultural ethos of the Malwa region of Punjab. It, therefore, establishes an altogether different identity of the Punjabi novel, assigning it the features of both a regional novel and a pastoral parable. His other two novels, *Anhoie* (Survivors) and *Adh Chanani Rat* (*Night of the Half Moon*), written successively after *Marhi da Diva*, also portray effectively the fate of common marginalised in different settings.

In the fiction of Gurdial Singh, characters of the novels are not happy with their present living conditions but their socio-economic circumstances compel them to live in same conditions. Although these characters are unable to get out of those conditions but their critical thinking make them stand apart from other

characters and just because of this reason his characters are more influential than classical characters of the traditional Punjabi novels.

The themes of the novelist Gurdial Singh's fiction are dynamic and based on the reality of common man in the Punjabi society. Gurdial Singh is influenced by Russian realist writers like Chekhov, Dostoevsky etc. and thus his writings also focus on representing the reality (Singh, Lekhak 58). During the period of 1960-70s when Gurdial Singh was writing his acclaimed novels, there were movements of experimentation and absurdism which influenced a lot of Punjabi writers, but Gurdial Singh remained mostly untouched by these and focused on representing the contemporary reality in all its colors and hues. Most of his novels are concerned with the period of green revolution when on one side, feudalism was still in existence and on the other hand, commercialization of agriculture on the capitalist pattern had already begun.

His novel *Night of the Half Moon* also presents the socio-cultural life of rural area which gets influenced by economic conditions. For the possession of land, farmers indulge in disputes and conflicts which lead to many conflicts and murders.

The protagonist of the novel *Night of the Half Moon* is Moddan who belongs to farming community and is serving the jail sentence for a murder. In the beginning of the narrative, Moddan returns home after completing his life sentence and tries to isolate himself from the problems of the village. His tragedy is that village life and agriculture based economy does not provide enough space for individual freedom. Further his relation with so-called culturally superior caste but economically weaker marginalised farming further complicates the problems. After taking revenge of his father's death, he could not live his life according to his wish. He does not get any respect from the society which considers him a murderer.

Gurdial Singh successfully portrays the plight of a small farmer who is struggling to make both ends meet. He uses critical realism to portray the socio-economic and cultural factors which influence an individual's life. Apart from Gurdial Singh's *Marhi Da Diva*, *Annhoye* and *Aadh Chanani Raat*, *Tutan Wala Khuh* by Sohan Singh Sital, *Eh Hamara Jiwana* by Dalip Kaur Tiwana, and many other novels also use critical realism.

Ram Saroop Ankhi and Karamjeet Singh Kussa were the contemporary novelists of Gurdial Singh during 1960-70s. In this time period, the trend of writing

realistic literature was at its peak. Like Gurdial Singh, Ram Saroop Ankhil presented the problems of lower caste exploited people of farming clans. Karamjeet Singh Kussa, in his famous novels *Burke Wale Lutere*, *Raat de Rahi*, *Rohi Biyabeen*, *Aag da Geet* and *Jakhmi Dareya* depicts different aspects like capitalist system, tragedy and problems of females, economic problems of middle class farmers. Along with these he also depicts the importance of land in the Punjabi society.

Like the Punjabi novel, modern Punjabi drama can also be best understood in terms of western influence on it. Though drama is a very old literary genre whose roots in India can be traced back to Sanskrit literature. But emergence of modern Punjabi drama can be attributed to the literary environment in Lahore at the beginning of the twentieth century with the emergence of I. C. Nanda as a dramatist. Before twentieth century, sole form of theatrical activity in Punjab was the skits and masquerades of street entertainers in towns and their counterparts in villages were called *bhanda*s who had their own private scripts which they presented on the festive occasions like marriage and birth of sons.

First Punjabis to devote their attention to this genre were Bawa Budh Singh and Brij Lal Sastri. Bhai Vir Singh also wrote a play in the same style, entitled *Raja Lakh Data Singh* (1909). He wrote this play in reaction to Bawa Budh Singh's play which he regarded as profane. Other attempts in this genre are represented by Gurbakhsh Singh Barrister's *Brij Mohan*, Feroze Din Sharaf's *Heer Syal* and some others. Lala Kirpa Sagar wrote a trilogy on Maharaja Ranjit Singh in which first two parts *Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Parts I and II* glorify the military conquests of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his generosity in dealing with vanquished rivals and foes like the Nawabs of Kasur and Multan, the Raja of Kangra, and his unsuccessful diplomatic attempts to win over the 'Phulkian' chiefs. The third entitled *Dido Jammu* which is often grouped together with the first mentioned two parts as Part III is in fact a glorification of the resistance offered by a chief under the Raja of Jammu to Ranjit Singh's conquest, and subsequent reconciliation with the Dogra people. The first two parts have attracted much attention for their appeal to Punjabi patriotic sentiment. Sharaf's *Heer Syal* is a verse play on the lines of verse romances written in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The modern period of Punjabi drama starts with Ishwar Chander Nanda. He wrote his first play *Suhag* in 1913 under the influence of Norah Richards. This play

was later published under the title *Dulhan*. He also wrote *Shamu Shah*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, written obviously in conformity with the state policy of discouraging usury which was common among moneylenders who thereby exploited peasants and other poor sections of the Punjabi society. In all his works, Nanda wrote about social problems and evils of society like economic exploitation of working class and gave voice to the females. Sant Singh Sekhon writes about Nanda's plays, "The influence of Ibsen can be seen in the fact that these plays are written for the purpose of social reform; they represent, too, conflict between the old and new generations in the resolution of which Nanda does not intend to overstep middle class sensibilities" (334).

Critic Sant Singh Sekhon was also a prominent playwright in the history of Punjabi drama. In his first play *Mahatama*, he develops the idea embodied in a saying that bread in a rich man's house has a sap of blood in it and in the poor man's house has a sap of milk. His play *Puttar* presents a rural scene of a peasant family working. He also signifies the social problems and evils of the society in his play *Duja Viah*. Sekhon takes up the inordinate vanity of mothers of young men becoming high officers getting them to repudiate their first wives and marrying for the second time to accord with the rise in their status. An exposure of the Indian trading class whose corrupt practices in business, smuggling and black-marketing intrude into its domestic life also appear in Sekhon's plays.

Gurdial Singh Phul is one of the most prolific playwrights in Punjabi. In his plays like *Adami di Akal*, *Dharti di Jai*, *Dharti di Awaz*, and *Lajja*, he focuses on social and economic problems of contemporary life. After these plays he takes a turn towards Sikh history and writes plays like *Tatti Vao Na lagai*, *Asi Dun Savai Hoye* and *Nanak Nadri Nadar Nihal*.

Harcharan Singh is the nearest successor to Nanda in both matter and manner. He came in the field of Punjabi play in 1937. Social evils and deplorable condition of woman in Punjabi Society take central place in his plays. *Kamala Kumari*, *Anjod*, *Khedan De Din Char* depict all these themes. After Independence, Harcharan Singh imbibed the progressive influences and tried to reinforce this tendency by writing plays from the Sikh historical tradition. In *Aji*, *Kal te Bhalak*, he tries to expose a corrupt and lecherous temple priest who dreams of becoming a minister but is arrested by the police in the case of black-marketing. So these playwrights mostly presented social, historical and mythological themes.

Balwant Gargi, a well-known playwright in Punjabi literature, is known for his mastery of dramatic techniques. He wrote plays with romantic, poetic overtones, with some social purpose thrown in. *Kuari Tisi, Pattan di Beri, Bebe, Kanak di Balli, Sail Pathar, Loha Kut* portrayed these themes but in *Dhuni di Agg*, he got influenced by an existentialist ideas.

Well known playwright, Kartar Singh Duggal is the author of seven full-length plays. *Mitha Pani, Kohkan, Shor te Sangeet, Ik Akh Ik Nazar*, and *Mian Meer* are his famous plays. As a playwright he has indulged in odd experiments in technique. He has also written a number of monologues.

Gurcharan Singh Jasuja made his name as a playwright when his play entitled *Gaumukha Shermukha* was published. His main concern is the projection of contemporary social reality highlighting its oddities. *Makri da Jal, Kandhan Ret Dian, Jungle, Char Diwari, Pachhtawa, Sikhar Dupehar ate Hanera* and *Paras di Chhoh* are his prominent plays.

Kapur Singh Ghuman started his career in playwriting with one act plays *Zaildar* and *Anhoni* which were written in realistic tradition. After that he began writing experimental plays. The characters of his plays are symbolic and represent different psychological states.

Surjit Singh Sethi accomplishes a commendable union of traditional realism and modernist experimentation. He started writing his plays in the traditional realistic style. His first play *Coffee House* portrays a picture of higher middle class in the metropolitan and industrial city. All his plays are influenced by theatre of the absurd. *Kadir Yar, Bharia Bharia Sakhana Sakhna, King, Mirza te Sapera, Mard Mard Nahin Tivin Tivin Nahin, Nangi Sadak Raat da Ohla* and *Eh Zindagi Hai Dosto* are written in technique of absurd.

Harsaran Singh treads a new path in his first full-length play *Jigra*. In *Lamme Sme da Narak*, he depicts different aspects of social, political and administrative life in our new democracy. His play *Kulachhne* revolves round sexual relations between men and women in the present age. So we can say that the themes of Harsaran Singh's play depict the problems of society.

Ajmer Singh Aulakh is one of the pioneering playwrights in Punjabi literature. He has made an attempt to portray the economic conditions of small farmers of Punjab. He emerged on Punjabi play scene in 1970s. He came into literary prominence with the publication of his first play *Aarbad Narbad*

Dhundhukara which was followed by many more significant plays like *Begane Bohar di Chhan*, *Anne Nisanchi*, *Sat Begane*, *Bhajian Bhahan*, *Gani*, *Kehar Singh di Maut*, *Salwan*, *Ik Si Darya*, *Jhanan de Pani*, *Ishaq Baajh Namaz da Hajj Nahi*, *Nikke Surajan di Larai* and *Niyon Jadh*. “The theme of Aulakh’s play is the economic situation of lower class farmers of Malwa region” (Chahal 17). He prefers the modern issues and adversities of life of lower class farmers in the villages of Punjab. He understands the crisis of farmers in Punjab. His plays depict the internal influences on the psychology of the individuals attached with political and social awareness. One can discuss his plays in reference to rural background because his plays present a picture of lower class rural life and he also projects a realistic picture of the farming community. His main themes are concerned with the depiction of village life. Problems of land less farmers get special focus in his plays. Aulakh states that not only he has suffered a lot because of his poor economic condition, but he has also seen sufferings of many other people. That is why; the plight of small farmers is one of dominant themes and will remain a major one in his plays (Brar 42).

Ajmer Singh Aulakh has developed his writing skill on the basis of reading foreign or domestic plays as well as his social and personal life. Therefore, all the plays so far represent a sharp and effective voice as to the problems of farmer’s life. The main reason of effectiveness of his plays is his social maturity based on life experiences and his own experiences have brought him at a distinct position in the field of Punjabi literature.

Kanwaldeep Kaur Brar has tried to analyze all the themes of Aulakh’s plays in her critical work *Ajmer Singh Aulakh di Nat Chetna*. She writes in the introduction of her text that Aulakh is a realistic playwright who depicts the plight of small peasants. She states that Aulakh’s work deals with Punjabi farmers, marriage tradition, and caste, female position in patriarchal society, illiteracy and economic condition of people of Punjab.

Gursharan Singh in his article “*Peindu Rangmanch Nu Aulakh di Dein*” says Aulakh portrayed different themes in different constructions. The main feature of rural theatre is that it mainly focuses on modern sensibility apart from folk theatre. Aulakh in his play depicts the problems of modern life of middle class people.

In “*Ajmer Aulakh di Vichardhara*” Dr. Kesar Singh Kesar articulates that Aulakh mainly focuses on psychological conditions, economic situations, unfulfilled

dreams of farmers and their familial conflicts due to poverty. One can also deduce from his plays that in the patriarchal society, woman is also exploited like a poor man and the exploitation of woman can be largely attributed to her economic dependence on man.

Satinder Singh in his article "*Ajmer Aulakh di Nataki Vilakhanta*" considers Aulakh as a realistic writer. He observes that Aulakh portrays the reality of the society.

Rajinder Singh has analysed all themes of Gurdial Singh's Novels from different aspects in his text *Navalkar Gurdial Singh di Trasad Drishti*. He exposes the themes in different aspects like the tragedy of being a human in Urban and Rural area, socio-cultural protests and problems of farmers.

In the collection, *Gurdial Singh Abhinandan Granth* Joginder Singh states that the novel *Night of The Half Moon* deals with the deteriorating economic condition of the Punjabi farmers community and their moral serenity as well as the inability to adept to the varying cultural conditions.

Jalour Singh while discussing *Night of the Half Moon* in his text *Gurdial Singh da Navali Jagat* writes that the novel depicts the socio-economic as well as the cultural conflict of the Punjabi society.

Rana Nayar in his article "Gurdial Singh: Storyteller Extraordinaire" says that Gurdial Singh portrays themes such as synthesis of tradition and modernity, concern for the underprivileged and man's revolutionary spirit that run throughout his writings.

Many researchers have done research on Ajmer Singh Aulakh as well as on Gurdial Singh in Punjabi language. But no work has been done to compare these two authors with respect to representation of socio-cultural concerns in their texts.

In this study, comparative analysis of writings of Gurdial Singh and Ajmer Singh Aulakh has been undertaken so as to analyze various socio-cultural concerns present in their texts. The object of the study is to examine how both the writers depict the social-cultural problems of the same area of Punjab and how they represent the condition of women in the Punjabi society. This can be a fruitful study in understanding the representation and transformation of real life issues into fictional narratives belonging to different genres.

The present study aspires to analyse the relationship between play and novel because there is similarity between Aulakh and Gurdial Singh's themes as both writers belong to the same region of the Punjab. Writings of both these writers depict the problems of lower class. These writers examine critically the cultural values that affect common person's life. They select those characters which represent ordinary life, living style and cultural values of the villages.

This introductory chapter was an attempt to discuss the meaning and importance of "realism". In addition, the endeavour was to discuss the brief history of Punjabi novel and play so as to understand the place of Gurdial Singh and Ajmer Aulakh in Punjabi literature. In the next chapter, focus will be on the detailed study of Ajmer Singh Aulakh's play *Sat Begane*, which will cover issues like troubles of the small farmers, the situation of women, problem of inter-caste marriage in Punjabi society etc. The third chapter will give comprehensive analysis of Gurdial Singh's novel *The Night of the Half Moon* with focus on its dominant themes like economic condition of rural area of Punjab, social-economic condition of small farmers, feeling of revenge, importance of honour, importance of land in Punjabi society, condition of female in rural area of Punjab etc. The fourth chapter of the dissertation will compare and contrast both texts with reference to their socio-cultural concerns and present the conclusion of the study.

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CHAPTER 2

Sat Begane: Portrayal of Complex Social Matrix of Rural Punjab

Ajmer Singh Aulakh is one of the prominent playwrights in Punjabi literature who has made a bold attempt to portray the deplorable economic conditions of small farmers of Punjab. He is gifted with a literary bent of mind and excellent command over day to day language. His spontaneity and efficient use of literary devices make his plays highly readable. He was born in a small middle class family of Sardar Kaur Singh on 19th August, 1942 in village Kumbharhwal, District Sangrur, Punjab. After graduation, he completed his M.A. (Punjabi) from Punjabi University, Patiala and subsequently became Lecturer in Nehru Memorial Government College, Mansa.

Drama is his favourite form of expression, because he feels that the message regarding real picture of life can reach people only through plays (Brar 55). Aulakh's plays have a special significance in the history of realistic Punjabi theatre. Aulakh has received many honours like Shiromani Natak-kaar Award and Pash Memorial Award (1999), Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (2005), Sahitya Akademi Award (2006).

He came into literary prominence with the publication of his first play *Aarbad Narbad Dhudhukara* (1978). Then he wrote many more long and short plays. For example *Begane Bohar di Chhan* (1981), *Anne Nishanchi te Hor Natak* (1984), *Mere Chonve Ikangi* (1985), *Sat Begane* (1987), *Bhajian Bhahan* (1987), *Gani* (1990), *Kehar Singh di Maut* (1992), *Salwan* (1993), *Ik Si Darya* (1994), *Jhanan de Pani* (1997), *Ishaq Baajh Namaz da Hajj Nahi* (2003), *Nikke Surjan di Larai* (2003) and *Niyon Jadh* (2008).

His play *Ishaq Baajh Namaz da Hajj Nahi* conveys how deeds and not rituals take one closer to the intrinsic philosophy of Sikhism. Notable feature of most of his work has been the manner in which he establishes the link between economic compulsions and social and family relationships. Some of his plays like *Begane Bohar di Chhan*, *Ik Ramayan Hor* etc. are based on the social life of the Punjabi people and make a link between economic deprivation and issues of socially unacceptable relationships. He vividly portrays depressing conditions of farmers in his plays. Aulakh himself asserts that before him, many writers have written about

the problems of farmers, but no one has focused on a particular community of farmers like him. (Aulakh, Sahitik 86).

Ajmer Singh Aulakh is highly influenced by Gurdial Singh. Giving an example of this literary relationship, Kamlesh Uppal writes that Aulakh has successfully created the play *Farida Rati Vadiya* based on the novel *Adh Chanani Raat (Night of the Half Moon)*, written by Gurdial Singh (185). Aulakh states that the realism portrayed in Gurdial Singh's works has highly influenced him...the meaningful realism which Gurdial Singh has contributed to Punjabi literature, has not been seen in any other Punjabi writer. The social realism which depicts reality of life is only observed in Gurdial Singh's creations. Owing to the influence of Gurdial Singh on his writing, Aulakh says that realism in his writings is mostly inspired by Gurdial Singh's writings... (75).

His writings can be categorised into short plays, one act plays, poetic dramas, and full plays. Aulakh has portrayed the problems of lower class farmers in a realistic manner. There is no aspect in the life of a farmer which has not been dealt with by the writer; whether the deterioration of lower class farmers due to the suppressions of upper class or the problems relating to marriage due to financial constraints or the problem of casteism or inter caste marriages. Each of these issues have been passionately dealt with by Aulakh using *Malwai* dialect, in a realistic way. While speaking about Aulakh's plays, Balwinder Singh Chahal states:

The theme of Aulakh's plays is the economic situation of lower class farmers of Malwa region. Most of his famous plays like *Begane Bohar di Chaan*, *Tudi Walla Kotha*, *Ik Ramayan Hor* and *Behkada Roh* depict the deteriorating situation of farmers. The position of most of the landless farmers in Punjab especially Malwa is declining day by day. (17)

Thus we can call Ajmer Singh Aulakh as a realistic playwright of small farmers. These farmers are suffering economic setbacks in their daily life. They are not capable of fulfilling even their ordinary desires. Sometimes, under the burden of economic compulsions, moral values come under strain. In the play *Sat Begane*, Jaikur has to enter in illicit relationship with her brother-in-law, so as to prevent him from marriage and to stop the further division of land. It is a distinct characteristic of the play to depict such hard and harsh realities of life. Most of his plays present contemporary social context in which the constant increase in expenditure and

decrease in the income resources give rise to many complex socio-economic problems. Satish Kumar Verma observes,

Aulakh was born in lower class agriculturist family. Due to the adversities of feudalistic system and his hard childhood experience, most of his characters derive their identity from lower agriculturist strata. The main subject of his plays is lack of land and poor status of farmers. Ajmer Singh Aulakh while clarifying the reasons points out that due to his upbringing in a lower class farming family, the problem of lack of land repeatedly nag him. (236)

While dealing with incidents of Malwa region as the subjects of his plays, he has frequently employed *Malwai* dialect of Punjabi language. In the article *Ajmer Singh Aulakh Da Natak: Nikke Surjan Di Larai* Ravinder Singh says that Ajmer Singh Aulakh presents the problems of a farmer's life with a progressive and realistic outlook (1). For a long time, he has been dealing with the portrayal of the problems of farmers' life in realistic method. T.R. Vinod supports the same opinion about Aulakh in the following words:

Aulakh is basically a playwright of tragedies of small farmers. The major part of Punjab's population is small farmers... Due to the joint cultivation of the land as a part of the ancestral property of the family, the economic crisis of the lower class farmers is getting worse day by day. Decline in the economic basis of farmers is the reality of social development which has been vividly represented with its cultural layers in his plays. (qtd. in Brar 43)

Aulakh's childhood experiences have influenced his choice of subject matter. He grew up in a lower class farming family, and he not only witnessed the life style of lower class farmers but also lived his life as a part of the same. The pain and pleasure, burdens and strains, needs, happiness and grief of the people from his own community in his surroundings have become an integral part of Aulakh's consciousness, and this reflects in his writings. Regarding his own background, he states:

... The present economic transformation in Punjab has led to the deterioration of the social and economic situation of lower class farmers in Punjab. Comparing their problems with other communities, it can be seen that even the landless labourers are in much better

position than lower class farmers. This disaster has been faced by me and my relatives. I have witnessed others facing the same crisis. Therefore, when I think of opting for other aspects of life as the subject matter of my plays, I feel that I am telling a lie to myself. (42)

Aulakh prefers the modern issues being faced by contemporary Punjabi society. He understands the crisis of farmers in Punjab. While analysing the crisis, he also tries to convey a message for solution of the crisis.

Traditionally agriculture has remained a labour intensive job, for which a large number of working hands are required. Tradition of joint family helps in providing this vital support, and when agricultural income is the lone source of livelihood for a family, then many it becomes a necessity to keep the family together. With the division of joint family into smaller individual units, size of land holding decreases, thereby decreasing income, while input costs remain almost same. This puts a strain on the human relationships also. Aulakh's plays *Begane Bohar di Chhan*, and *Sat Begane* deal with these kinds of issues.

As farmers form a huge chunk of rural population of Punjab, so crisis of farmers has its cascading affect on other social institutions also. The most affected is the institution of marriage, because marriage means the creation of new family unit which can result in the division of land. On the other hand, as land is an important source of livelihood, so parents give importance to land holding while match-making. This results in problems in getting married for those prospective brides and grooms who have less land, and many unhealthy practices arise in the otherwise sacred institution of marriage.

Unable to find a suitable partner in their own caste or class, some people try to buy their brides from poor people. Similarly, it happens that in a big family, parents can afford to marry only one son, and rest of the brothers remain unmarried. This results in lot of individual and familial issues. Ajmer Singh Aulakh displays these types of problems in *Sat Begane* and also in his short play *Ik Ramayan Hor*. In this context, Giyani Gurdit Singh depicts:

Due to economic constraints and falling ratio of girls in the villages of Punjab, it has become a social custom now that if one son of a Jat gets married, it is considered that all of his sons are married. (33-36)

Due to this distinction of choosing real life issues of downtrodden section of society, Aulakh has a special place among Punjabi playwrights. From I. C. Nanda

to Balwant Gargi, Gurcharan Singh, Atamjit and other Punjabi playwrights have led to the evolution of some new trends in Punjabi literature. Similarly, with his focus on realistic portrayal of small farmers of Malwa region, Aulakh has contributed in unfolding the inner conflicts of a specific socio-cultural region of Punjab. In this regard, Satinder Singh Noor opines,

The research and discussion on realist methods started with I.C. Nanda as he expressed it through conversational techniques. I. C. Nanda was well acquainted with Shakespearean and other English plays but he did not adopt their realism, rather he developed a different kind of realistic method to suit Punjabi drama. At that time, realism was not the accepted trend; But Nanda developed this trend with his own methods and merged with it an attitude of thought provoking awareness. (33)

The main plays which established Aulakh's identity are *Begane Bohar di Chhan* and *Sat Begane*. He has emerged as a refined writer of lower class farmers. His writings are free from the concepts of romanticism and idealism. The main focus of his plays is the critical analysis of modern socio-economic structure. For him, personal property is the root cause of many issues. The majority of Punjabi farming community comprises of small farmers. The condition of these farmers is not good and even after working very hard their condition is deteriorating day by day. His three plays, *Sat Begane*, *Begane Bohar di Chhan*, and *Ik Ramayan Hor* illustrate the realities of farming class.

Sat Begane is a full-length play. The protagonist of this play Bachna falls in love with a girl from lower caste of the same class and marries her. This alliance is against the conventions of the society. Intercaste marriage and marriage within the village is not accepted by rural Punjabi community and this violation of social norms ruins the future of the family.

With the passage of time, it appears that people have forgotten their wrongdoing and Bachna and Jaikur start living their life in the village like normal couple. They become parents of four sons, Nahari, Karma, Dharma and Dhindi. In the beginning of the play, all these four sons are of a marriageable age. They face problems in finding a suitable match for themselves due to the inter caste marriage of their father with the girl from a lower caste. In the preface of *Sat Begane*, Raghbir Singh writes,

In a feudalistic society, the background, social status and financial status of families are evaluated by each side for the purpose of marriage. There would not be any match for the sons of Jaikur in such a society. If she gets a match for her sons, it would not be a suitable match but it would be a mismatch born out of greed for money or inability to find a match. (Aulakh, Sat 10)

This play is divided into three acts. The names of these three acts, *Anne Suraj*, *Anne Suraj di Vehangi*, *Supne Jeao Sansar*, respectively symbolise the message of the acts. Amarjit Singh Kang observes that if one goes and inquires into the deep sense of these titles, one can understand the expansion of the theme of the play. (117).

Ajmer Singh Aulakh tries to bring about social change through his plays. His plays try to depict the emotional turmoil happening inside individuals trapped in an unjust system. Aulakh possesses a deep insight about rural life and has a good hold of rural language especially *Malwai*, therefore, he is able to lay bare the life of small farmers. The following instance from his play *Begane Bohar di Chhan* portrays the same:

ਉਇ ਆਪਣਾ ਜੱਟਾਂ ਦਾ ਤਾਂ ਚੰਦਾ ਸਿਆਂ ਏ ਹੀ ਹਾਲ ਰਹੂ। ਆਪਣਾ ਨੀ, ਜੇ ਤੂੰ ਕਰੇ, ਕਦੇ ਹੱਥ ਖੁੱਲ੍ਹਾ ਹੁੰਦਾ। ਤੂੰ ਦੇਖ ਲੈ ਐਨੀ ਉਮਰ ਤੇਰੀ ਨੰਘਰੀ, ਚਾਲੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਨੇੜੇ ਤੇੜੇ ਮੈਂ ਹੋਊ। ਓਹੀ ਬਾਹਾਂ, ਓਹੀ ਕੁਹਾੜੀ ਨਵੇਂ ਬੀ ਵੀ ਆਗੇ, ਜੂਰੀਏ ਵੀ ਆਗੇ, ਟਰੈਕਟਰ ਵੀ ਆਗੇ, ਪਰ ਕੱਟੇ ਨੂੰ ਮਣ ਦੁੱਧ ਦਾ ਕੀ ਲੇਸ? ਕੀ ਕਹਿੰਦੈ? ਥੋੜੀ ਪਰਖੋਂ ਆਲੇ ਤਾਂ ਓਹੀ ਮੋਲਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਪੁੜੇ ਕੁੱਟਦੇ ਫਿਰਦੇ ਐ, ਦਾਣੇ ਚਾਰ ਮਣ ਵੱਧ ਹੋਗੇ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਵਿਆਹ ਸਾਹੇ ਤੇ ਲੱਗਗੇ ਪਰਨਾਲਾ ਉਥੇ ਦਾ ਉਥੇ...

Oye, Chanda Siyan, we Jats are going to live in the same condition. We can never live lavishly. You have lived a long life and even I am almost forty, still we work with our hands and simple tools although several new varieties of seeds, tractors and tools are available, but what use are they for people like us? What do you say? Farmers having small landholdings still stand where they were. If we would have had bit more money, we would spend it on the wedding or some such ceremony; otherwise, our status is going to remain the same. (15)

Aulakh here attempts to present the economic, social and psychological crisis. "The poor state of affairs of ordinary labour class farmers under present regime has been depicted artistically by him through his plays" (Kahlon 28).

The modern farmer faces a critical situation in the present capitalist model of economy. The benefits of green revolution have been availed by big and influential landlords only, because use of new techniques of agriculture requires capital investment and unable to do so, farmers borrow money, but return of agricultural inputs for small farmers is very less, so they are trapped in a circle of debt. They are left with no other option except to sell their land. Farmers who are emotionally attached to their lands find it traumatic to part with their land. Aulakh's play *Nikke Surjan di Larai* is a portrayal of such problems. A day to day increase in loan affects the farmers with many adversities and adds to their mental depression. The outcome of this depression is that sometimes the farmers start following the wrong path and incline towards committing suicide.

In Punjabi society, land is the basis of the livelihood because agriculture is the main occupation. Ownership of the land is one of the parameters for determining the social status of people in rural areas. With decreasing land holding, reputation and social standing of the family also decreases and this results in number of new problems. Due to less land holdings, the earnings of lower class farmers is also low and they find it difficult to sustain their families in such a low income.

Fertile land is the guarantee for the better present and future of the family. So, land has a very special and important place in the life of a farmer. He leaves no stone unturned to take care of his landholdings. In pursuance of this aim, he does not even restrain himself from sharing his wife with his brothers. In the play *Sat Begane*, referring to the illicit relationship between Bhanga and Jaikur, Chandu says:

ਭਤੀਜੇ ਵੀ ਕਿਹੜੇ! ਅਸੀਂ ਤਾਂ ਪੁੱਤ ਈ ਆਖਾਂਗੇ ਤੇਰੇ! ਛੋਟੇ ਧਿੰਦੀ ਦਾ ਮੁੜ੍ਹੰਗਾ ਤਾਂ ਜਮਾਂ ਤੇਰੇ 'ਤੇ ਐ, ਤੂੰ ਮੰਨ ਭਾਵੇਂ ਨਾ ਮੰਨ। ਫੇਰ ਐਵੇਂ ਕਹੀਏ ਜੈ ਕੁਰ ਨੇ ਵੀ ਤੇਰੇ ਨਾਲ ਕੋਈ ਦਰਿਆਤ ਨਹੀਂ ਰੱਖੀ। ਰੱਖੀ ਹੋਵੇ ਤਾਂ ਤੂੰ ਦਸ ਦੇ! ਹੈਂ!

... Why call them nephew, they are indeed your sons...the younger Dhindhi resembles you a lot, whether you admit this or not. Jaikur has

maintained good relations with you. If she has ever ignored you, you must point out. (Aulakh, Sat 33)

In his another play *Ik Ramayan Hor*, the character of Ram gives an indication of approval to his brother Lachha for establishing illicit relationship with his own wife Seeto. Seeto does not want to do this, yet Ram while elucidating on the importance of land, says: ਨਾ ਕਰ! ਪਰ ਜਿੱਦੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਮੁੰਡੇ ਗੱਭਰੂ ਹੋ-ਗੇ ਵਿਆਹੁਣ ਜੋਗੇ, ਉਦੋਂ ਤੈਨੂੰ ਪਤਾ ਲੱਗੂ ਬਈ ਜ਼ਮੀਨ ਜਾਇਦਾਦ ਕੀ ਹੁੰਦੀਐ ਜੱਟ ਦੇ ਪੁੱਤ ਲਈ! Don't do. But the day, when your sons will be young and eligible for marriage, then you will realize the importance of land in the life of a Jat! (Aulakh, Begane 76)...ਠੀਕ ਐ ਤੇਰੀ ਗੱਲ। ਜੱਟ ਕੋਲ ਥੋੜੀ ਜ਼ਮੀਨ ਹੋਣਾ ਈ ਸਰਾਪ ਐ! You are right. It is a curse for a Jat to have small piece of land! (76) In the same play, the conversation of Dani also reflects the importance of land in the life of a farmer:

ਜੇ ਮੈਂ ਕਮਲੀ ਹੁੰਦੀ ਪੰਜੇ ਲੜ ਭਿੜ ਕੇ ਅੱਡ ਹੋ ਜਾਂਦੇ! ਸਾਰੀ ਭੋਂਏ ਖੱਖਰ-ਭੱਖਰ ਹੋ ਜਾਂਦੀ। ਮੇਰੇ ਪੁੱਤ ਕੋਲ ਰਹਿ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਪੰਜ ਘੁੰਮਾਂ। ਹੁਣ 'ਕੱਲੇ ਨੂੰ ਪੱਚੀ ਆਉਂਦੀ ਐ! ਸੁੱਖ ਨਾਲ ਰੰਗ ਲੱਗਿਐ ਤੇਰੇ ਸਾਹਮਣੇ! ਖੱਬੀ ਖਾਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਤਾਂ ਢੁੱਕਿਐ! ਖੇਤ ਟਰੈਕਟਰ ਚਲਦੇ, ਘਰ ਸਾਰਾ ਪੱਕੀਆਂ ਇੱਟਾਂ ਦੇ!...(ਜਾਂਦੀ ਵਾਰ ਦੀ ਤਾੜਨਾ ਕਰਦੀ) ਜ਼ਮੀਨ ਬਹੁਤ ਕੁਸ਼ ਐ ਪੁੱਤ, ਜੱਟ ਦੇ ਪੁੱਤ ਲਈ ਬਹੁਤ ਕੁਸ਼...

If I would have been mad, all five must have died fighting with each other. The whole land must have been divided in small pieces. My son might have had only five *ghumas* ! While now he enjoys the ownership of twenty five *ghumas*! It is a matter of delight that he has got engaged in a reputed family! Tractors are ploughing his fields! The whole house is built of bricks! (reminds while going out) Land holds too much importance, dear son...too much for the son of a Jat. (83)

In this way, an attempt has been made through all the plays of Aulakh to showcase the importance of land, whether it is *Sat Begane*, or *Ik Ramayan Hor*.

Whether it is the issue relating to marriage of a Jat or anyone else, landholdings play an important role in determining his status in society. The main ground to assess the financial position of a farmer is his land. Every parent of a daughter prefers to marry her in an economically sound family. In case of good landholdings, no consideration is given to age or other factors. This psychology comes to light through the dialogues of Chandu and Bhanga:

ਤੈਨੂੰ ਅੱਡ ਹੋਏ ਨੂੰ ਘਾਟਾ ਸੀ ਤੀਮੀਆਂ ਦਾ! ਅੱਧ ਦਾ ਮਾਲਕ ਐਂ, ਅੱਠ ਕਿੱਲੇ ਝੋਟੇ ਦੇ ਸਿਰ ਅਰਗੀ ਜ਼ਮੀਨ ਦੇ ਆਉਂਦੇ ਐ। ਅੱਠਾਂ ਦੇ ਸਿਰ 'ਤੇ ਤਾਂ ਧੀ ਦੇਣ ਵਾਲਿਆਂ ਦੀ ਹੋੜ ਲੱਗ-ਜੇ!

You are in no dearth of women even after the split. You own half the property; you have eight acres of very fertile land. Girls' families will rush to your doorstep for your hand in marriage considering your land! (Aulakh, Sat 33)

If one has good landholding, then the destitute parents of a girl prefer to marry their daughter to him, irrespective of his being a widower or elder in age. Though this perception may not be applicable to everybody, yet its existence cannot be denied. The idea of Marx seems true in this background that economic conditions become the basis of human relations; its reflection can be seen in the plays written by Ajmer Singh Aulakh.

Aulakh has portrayed different pictures of the women through his plays and made rural life the basic theme of his writings. To prevent division of land after marriage, the custom of marrying only one son is also in vogue in some parts of the region. Rest of the unmarried sons always desire for the companionship of a woman. Aulakh has highlighted this problem in *Sat Begane* as well as in other plays also. Women have an important place in the life of men. Aulakh has pointed out the importance of women also in his play *Sat Begane*.

ਕਰਮਾ: ਤੀਵੀਆਂ ਬਿਨਾਂ ਕਿਹੜਾ ਨੰਘਣੀ ਨੀ ਚਾਚਾ? ਰਿਸ਼ੀ-ਮੁਨੀ ਵੀ ਤਾਂ ਜੂਨਾਂ ਕੱਟ ਈ ਗਏ!

ਲੱਕੜਚੱਬ: ਐਵੇਂ ਵਾਧੂ ਕਹਿਣ ਕਹਾਉਣ ਦੀਆਂ ਗੱਲਾਂ ਕਰਮ ਸਿਆਂ। ਤੀਵੀਂ ਨੇ ਤਾਂ ਵੱਡੇ-ਵੱਡੇ ਜਤੀਆਂ-ਸਤੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਗੱਡੇ ਡਹੀਏ ਕੀਤੇ ਐ! ਮੇਣਕਾ ਨੇ ਵਿਸ਼ਵਾਮਿੱਤਰ ਦੀ ਸਮਾਧੀ ਭੰਗ ਕੀਤੀ, ਕੀਤੀ ਕਿ ਨਈਂ? ਬਰੁਮਾ ਆਪਣੀ ਧੀ 'ਤੇ ਈ ਬਦਨੀਤ ਹੋਇਆ। ਫੇਰ ਆਪਾਂ ਮਾਤ-ਲੋਕ ਦੇ ਵਾਸੀ ਕੀਹਦੇ ਪਾਣੀ ਹਾਰ ਐਂ ?

KARMA. Is it not possible to live without a spouse? One can look at Rishis and Munis- they also spent their life without spouses.

LAKADCHAB. This is all useless talk Karam Siyan. Women have seduced and distracted even great practitioners of meditation!

Menaka disturbed the meditation of Vishwamitra! Brahma lusted after his own daughter. Then how can ordinary men like us be any greater? (Aulakh, Sat 71)

ਧਰਮਾ: ਤੀਵੀਆਂ ਆਲੇ ਤਾਂ ਬੜੇ ਸੁਖੀ ਐ? ਬਘਿਆੜੀਆਂ ਤੀਵੀਆਂ ਨਾਲੋਂ ਤਾਂ ਬੰਦਾ 'ਕੱਲਾ-ਕਹਿਰਾ ਈ ਚੰਗਾ!

ਲੱਕੜਚੱਬ: ਨਹੀਂ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਤੂੰ ਭੁਲਦੈਂ! ਤੀਵੀਂ ਸਾਲੀ 'ਚ ਲੱਖ ਐਬ ਹੋਵੇ ਪਰ ਜੇ ਬੰਦੇ ਨੂੰ ਮੋਹ ਕਰਨ ਆਲੀ ਚੀਜ਼ ਰੱਬ ਨੇ ਘੜੀ ਐ ਤਾਂ ਉਹ ਤੀਵੀਂਓ ਘੜੀ ਐਂ! ਹੁਣ ਤੂੰ ਦੂਰ ਨਾ ਜਾਹ। ਮਿੰਦ੍ਹੇ ਦਾ ਤਿਉਹ ਸੀ ਆਪਣੇ ਨਾਹਰੀ ਨਾਲ। ਦੇਖ ਲੈ ਮਰੇ ਤੋਂ ਵੀ ਰੱਬ ਆਂਗੂ ਪੂਜਦੀ ਐ!

DHARMA. Are the people with wives very happy? It is much better to live alone instead of living with shrewd women.

LAKARCHAB. Giani, it is not like that. A woman may have a hundred blemishes, but if God has created anything to love man, it is only a woman! You have no need to go too far. Look at Mindho's attachment with Nahari. She worships him even after his death. (72)

In *Ik Ramayan Hor* Aulakh illustrates the same through the conversation of Lachha.

ਲੱਛਾ: ਸੱਚੀ ਰੋਣੀ, ਤੂੰ ਆਖੇਂਗਾ ਤਾਂ ਕੀ ਆਖਦੈ, ਜਿੱਦੇ ਦੀ ਤੈਂ ਤੀਵੀਂ ਦਵਾਉਣ ਦੀ ਗੱਲ ਕੀਤੀ ਐ, ਮਨ ਉਖੜਿਆ ਉਖੜਿਆ ਜਿਆ ਰਹਿੰਦੈ ਮੇਰੇ ਸਾਲੇ ਦਾ। ਰੋਜ਼ ਕੋਈ ਨਾ ਕੋਈ ਸੁਫਨਾ ਤੀਵੀਂ ਦਾ ਜ਼ਰੂਰ ਆਉਂਦੈ।

LACHHA. Really Rauni, you will mind what I am saying. Since the day you have discussed the matter of getting me a woman, this poor mind is disturbed. Every day, I dream of women. (Aulakh, Begane 71)

Sacrifice is considered an important part of a loving relationship. In this play, Mindho loves Nahari and gives support to him in every possible way. She sells all her ornaments to get Nahari acquitted from Jail. Aulakh dwells on the philosophy of love. It is the notion of love which makes a person curious to surrender and sacrifice his/her existence for his or her lover. The obstacle ridden path of love challenges people to their limits. In *Sat Begane*, Nahari asks Mindho about the prospect of their relationship:

ਮਿੰਦ੍ਹੇ: ਜਦੋਂ ਤੱਕ ਨਿਭੂ, ਨਿਭਾਉਣ ਦੀ ਕੋਸ਼ਟ ਕਰੂ!

MINDHO. I will try to stay with you as long as it is possible. (52)

After the death of Nahari, Mindho constructs a '*Marhi*', and worships his '*Marhi*' throughout her life; through this scene, Aulakh presents the feeling of love.

Socially accepted relationship of husband and wife is basic unit of family, which remains under regular pressure of personal and social expectations. One problem which causes friction in the relationship of husband and wife is the entry of third person in the relationship, and this usually results in disintegration of family

and society also generally does not approve these kinds of illicit relationships. But in Malwa belt, harsher realities of life take precedence over morality and family and society have to ignore these things. Due to paucity of land, in many families, only one son could get married, and his wife was shared by other brothers. Result was that number of family units after marriage remained almost same, and ancestral land was not divided further. But this arrangement had huge psychological consequences for the persons involved in it.

This theme of marrying only one son due to financial constraints occurs prominently in this play. In the greediness of having whole chunk of ancestral land for his own family, a farmer asks her wife to establish conjugal relations with his brothers, so that they don't think about marrying someone and starting their own family. This is a very complex arrangement in which both sides come under psychological strain. When Lakadchab's brother who has been kept unmarried by his brother and bhabhi, desires for woman, Lakadchab fears the partition of ancestral land after marriage, and to stop this, he asks his wife to please his brother so that he does not get married, and the land remains with them. But, Inder, the brother of Lakadchab, goes ahead for partition of landholdings, so that he can get married on his own, then his bhabhi does not hesitate in disclosing her illicit relations with him in public, so as to stop him from dividing the property. He shares this incident with Karma:

ਫੇਰ ਧਰਮ ਸਿਆਂ ਤੇਰੇ ਆਲੀ ਚਾਚੀ ਉੱਠੀ ਗੋਹੇ ਆਲੇ ਹੱਥ ਝਾੜਦੀ! ਕੱਢ ਕੇ ਛੱਜੂ ਰਾਮ ਵਕੀਲ ਆਂਗੂ- ਬਾਂਹ ਲੰਬੀ, ਕਹਿੰਦੀ 'ਵੇ ਮਿੱਠੂ ਦੇ ਤਾਇਆ! ਜਰੂਰ ਅੱਡ ਹੋਣੈ।' ਇੰਦਰ ਕਹਿੰਦਾ, 'ਹਾਅ! ਜਰੂਰ ਹੋਣੈ।' ਤੇਰੀ ਚਾਚੀ ਕਹਿੰਦੀ, 'ਫੇਰ ਐਇੰ ਕਰ! ਛੀ ਜਬਾਕ ਵੀ ਨੇ ਘਰ 'ਚ, ਉਹ ਵੀ ਵੰਡਾ ਲੈ!'

Then Dharam Siyan, your Chachi stood up while cleansing her dirty hands covered with dung. Imitating Chajju Ram Advocate, she said, 'O Mithu's Taya! Are you really going to separate'? Inder replied, 'Yes! definitely.' Then your Chachi said, 'Ok then, there are six children at home, you should also divide them between yourselves! (Aulakh, Sat 71)

Sat Begane focuses on the domestic turmoil arising out of financial strain in the family of lower class farmers. Since land is the basis of livelihood for a farmer, so loss of land is a big emotional, psychological and economic set-back and Aulakh

presents this theme repeatedly in his plays. Raghbir Singh observes in the preface of the play *Sat Begane*.

The whole play deals with the social, cultural and economic problems of lower class farmers which influenced their emotions and led them to dissatisfaction. The focus might be on a tragedy of the family, yet this play portrays a tragic picture of lower class labour of the whole village. (9)

Amarjit Singh Kaang writes that themes in most of the plays written by Aulakh are common in nature. These themes are primarily based on economic hardships of daily life of an individual and how he is unable to come out of this vicious circle even after his best efforts. Issues of traditions, customs, castes etc. further complicate the problem.

Customs, usages and rituals are the indicators of ideals in a society. Therefore, all the groups accept them as social rules. The person violating such a social custom, usage or ritual has to suffer the wrath of the society. In this play, Bachna violates the social rules in dual manner. Firstly, there is no custom of inter-caste marriages in Punjabi community. Secondly, one cannot marry the girl from his own village, it is strictly prohibited. Bachna infringes this social custom in the passion of young age, but he suffers terrible consequences of this violation at the later stages of his life. Due to this act, his younger brother Bhanga remains unmarried. Even his sons could not get married due to his inter-caste and same-village marriage. A person of reputation and self respect does not like to marry his daughter with his sons. This makes it crystal clear that the violation of social customs affects not only life of the violator Bachna, but also influences the life of his whole family. The whole society breaks up ties with this family. His brother Bhanga could not get married due to Bachna and their clever adversaries like Chandu instigate him against Bachna:

ਕਮਲਿਆ ਬਦਨਾਮੀ ਥੋੜੀ ਖੱਟੀ ਸੀ ਬਚਨੇ ਨੇ? ਇੱਕ ਝਿਊਰੀ, ਦੂਜੀ ਪਿੰਡ ਦੀ ਪਿੰਡ ਵਿੱਚ! ਐਂਏ ਕਿਤੇ ਸੁਣਿਐ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਚੜ੍ਹਦੇ-ਲਹਿੰਦੇ 'ਤੇ! ਐਡਾ ਵੱਡਾ ਕਲੰਕ! ਓਸੇ ਕਲੰਕ ਨੇ ਤਾਂ ਤੇਰੀਆਂ ਜੜ੍ਹਾਂ 'ਚ ਫੇਰੀ ਦਾਤੀ! ਤੈਨੂੰ ਨਾ ਕਿਸੇ ਨੇ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਧੀ। ਅਖੇ, 'ਕੀਤੀ ਬਚਨੇ ਨੇ, ਭੁਗਤੀ ਭੰਗੇ ਨੇ!'

O dear fellow, Bachna had defamed himself. He married a lower caste lady, and that also from the same village. Have you ever heard

of a thing like this? It is really a great stigma! This stigma has ruined your life! Nobody will give you his daughter. That is to say, 'you have suffered for the deeds of your kinsmen.' (Aulakh, Sat Begane 33)

Even his sons do not appreciate his act of marrying an inter caste girl and they hold him liable for all the tragedies and adversities being faced by their family. ਅਸੀਂ ਤੈਨੂੰ 'ਸਿੱਧਾ ਬੋਲਣ ਵਾਲੇ ਨੂੰ' ਵੀ ਜਾਣ- ਦੇ ਐਂ ਚੰਗੀ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ! ਤੇਰੀਆਂ ਸਿੱਧੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਤਾਂ... Are we not aware of your so called good intentions? It is all because of your... (Aulakh, Sat Begane 24)

Whether it is the issue of inter-caste marriage of Bachna or problems in the marriage of Bhanga, each of the issues have been addressed by inter-relating it with the context of customs and rituals. Aulakh shows that one has to live his life within the rules and customs framed by the society.

The entire life of an individual is framed by the customs and rituals and one can go ahead in life only by adhering to these customs. Giani Gurdit Singh writes:

The whole lives of our village folks are threaded like beads in the rosary of rites and rituals. The life of a man, he is destined to live, is almost doubled through these rites and rituals. (246)

Customs and rituals are the backbone of rural life. Nahar Singh, while speaking about the different traditions of some specific communities in Malwa region, writes:

Malwai culture's rituals and traditions show influences of various castes, classes and their customs. It includes the concept of worshipping of lifeless objects, gods and goddesses to one shapeless almighty and chanting his name. (31)

Violation of any of these norms leads to humiliation as Bachna feels embarrassed throughout his life. The conversation of the father of Jaikur reflects the social tradition of not recognising love marriage and breaking up of all ties with the girl by her parents. He attempts to discuss how an act of the daughter can affect the reputation of the whole family. When Jaikur was going to marry Bachana by contravening her parents, her father says:

ਲੈ ਜੈ ਕੁਰੇ! ਜਿਹੜਾ ਤੈਂ ਭਾਈਆਂ ਦਾ ਨੱਕ ਵੱਢਿਐ, ਪਿਉ ਦੀ ਪੱਗ ਰੋਲੀ ਐ, ਸੁੱਖ ਨੀਂ ਪਾਏਂਗੀ! ਆਹ-ਲੀ ਨੀਂ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਬੁੱਢੇ ਬਾਪ ਦੀ ਬਦਸੀਸ!

Jaikur, you would never sleep at ease after insulting your brothers and disobeying your father. The curse of aged parents never goes in vain. (41)

In the young age, this type of socially unacceptable relationships have their own fascination, but with the passage of time, it becomes quite difficult to remain aloof from the society. When Dhindi talks about Mindho, his brother reminds him his father's deeds and forbids him to do anything which can go against the norms of society.

ਧਰਮਾ: ਰਹਿਣ ਦੇ ਵੱਡਿਆ ਮਿਰਜਿਆ! ਰਹਿਣ ਦੇ, ਅੱਗੇ ਪਿਉ ਦੀਆਂ ਕੀਤੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਈ ਲੇਖੇ ਨੀਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ, ਹੋਰ ਕਿੱਥੋਂ ਭੁਗਤਾਂਗੇ?

DHARMA. O Mirza, Leave this matter. We could not face the consequences of the mistakes committed by our father throughout the life. What more can we face? (74)

Casteism and poor financial position combine to worsen the problem, because social evils have more affect on economically weaker sections of the society. In Punjabi society, marriage is usually arranged by parents after careful scrutiny of concerned families and their histories. As society considers inter-caste marriage as a violation of social rules, so parents refrain from such alliances and it becomes difficult for children born out of this type of relationships to get any suitable matrimonial alliance. The marriage can be possible only when they give a lot of money to the parents of the girl. This thing is illustrated in the play when Nahari's uncle suggests a girl for him.

ਕਰਮਾ: ਕੁੜੀ ਦੀ ਉਮਰ ਕਿੰਨੀ ਕੁ ਹੈ?

ਬਲਵੰਤ: ਕੁੜੀ ਤਾਂ ਭਰ ਜੁਆਨ ਐ... ਸੋਲਾਂ ਸਤਾਰਾਂ ਸਾਲ ਦੀ

ਜੈ ਕੁਰ: ਫੇਰ ਹਜ਼ਾਰ-ਬਾਰਾਂ ਸੌ ਪਿੱਛੇ ਕੀ ਦੇਖਣੇ। ਮੇਰੀ ਮੰਨੋ ਤਾਂ ਹਾਂ ਕਹਿ ਦਿਓ।

KARAMA. How old is the girl?

BALWANT. The girl is in the prime of her youth...sixteen or seventeen years old.

JAIKUR. Then why do you hesitate for a mere thousand rupees...say yes, I say. (26)

As said earlier, marriage becomes like a commercial deal in which economic and social status of a family is constantly under scrutiny, and when something bad happens to the fortunes of the family, this deal can be broken.

When Bachna and Bhanga divide their ancestral property and start living separately, engagement of Bachna's son Nahari is broken, because now his land decreases by half. However, another reason behind this broken relationship is the intercaste marriage of her parents. In the play *Sat Begane*, Aulakh presents this during conversation of Jaikur with Marajho:

ਮਰਾਝੋ: ਮੈਂ ਤਾਂ ਤੇਰੇ ਕਹੇ ਤੋਂ ਬਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਈ ਕਈ ਵਾਰ ਗੱਲ ਛੇੜ ਕੇ ਦੇਖੀ ਐ... ਬਸ ਤੇਰਾ ਤੇ ਬਾਬਾ ਜੀ ਆਲਾ ਅੜਿੱਕਾ ਮੂਹਰੇ ਆ ਅੜਦੈ। ਅਥੈ, ਜੇ ਕੋਈ ਮੁੰਡੇ ਦੇ ਨਾਨਕੇ ਪੁੱਛੇ ਤਾਂ ਕੀ ਦਸਾਂਗੇ? ਬਈ ਮੁੰਡੇ ਦੀ ਮਾਂ... ਬਦਨਾਮੀ ਆਲੀ...

MARAJHO. I have tried to raise the matter many a time...but the issue of yours and your husband comes in the way. If somebody asks about the background of the boy's mother, what shall we reply...that boy's mother is tainted... (46)

When Jaikur initiates talk with her neighbour for the marriage of her son, the facts discussed depress her and she is provoked to state:

ਜੈ ਕੁਰ: ਕੁੜੇ ਤੀਹ ਸਾਲ ਹੋ-ਗੇ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਜੱਟ ਦੇ ਘਰ ਵਸਦੀ ਨੂੰ, ਅਜੇ ਮੈਂ ਝਿਉਰੀ ਰਹਿ-ਗੀ? ਹੈਥੇ ਕੰਜਰ ਜੱਟਾਂ ਦੇ ਮੁੰਡੇ ਨਿੱਤ ਖੇਤੀ- ਬੰਨੀ ਚੂੜੀਆਂ-ਚਮਿਆਰੀਆਂ ਨਾਲ ਸੌ ਖੇਹ ਖਾਂਦੇ ਐ, ਓਦੋਂ ਪਤਾ ਨੀਂ ਕਿਥੇ ਜਾਂਦੀਐਂ ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਜਾਤਾਂ! ਮੈਂ ਚੜ੍ਹੀਆਂ ਕਪਾਹਾਂ 'ਚ ਕੰਜਰਖਾਨਾ ਕਰਨ ਦੀ ਥਾਂ ਸਿੱਧੀ ਜੱਟ ਦੇ ਘਰ ਆ ਵਸੀ ਤਾਂ ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਕੰਜਰਾਂ ਦੇ ਖਾਨਦਾਨ ਭ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਟਣ ਲੱਗ ਪੇ!

JAIKUR. About thirty years, I have spent at the home of a Jat and still I am a *Jhiyuri*? Here, the bastard sons of Jats indulge in illicit relations with the women of lower class in the farms. Don't they know their castes at that time? Instead of accommodating them in the farms, I came and started living at the home of a Jat, how does it taint their reputation and creed! (46)

This play also reflects the attempt made by Aulakh to give a glimpse of some traditional cultural values. Every writer writes something new in the light of these traditions. Traditions contain very precious values which cannot be ignored. The social and cultural values highlighted by Aulakh in this play form an important part of the society. Throughout this play, Jaikur seems keen to see the marriage of her sons but none of the respectable families are ready to marry their daughter due to Jaikur's lower caste. Village folks don't forget her caste and her family background, and even after so many years of living life in a 'Jat's house, no one considers her

'Jati'. Even her friend Marajho follows the dominant line of the society and considers it wrong to marry outside the caste. ਉਹ ਤਾਂ ਠੀਕ ਐ ਅੰਮਾਂ ਜੀ! ਪਰ ਵਚਾਰ ਤਾਂ ਹੋਈ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਐ! ਫੇਰ ਪਿੰਡ ਦੀ ਧੀ ਓਸੇ ਪਿੰਡ ਦੀ ਨੂੰਹ...। That is right Amma Ji, but the discussion is still on. Then the daughter of the village becomes daughter in law in the same village! (46).

Too much self-respect and self-pride is a common feature of farming life style and especially Punjabi Jats have this superficial pride which causes many social frictions and complications. In this play, a girl is engaged to Nahari, but his uncle breaks their relationship and buys that girl for himself. When Nahari comes to know about this, he feels so much shock that he murders his uncle, because in Punjabi society, it is a huge disgrace for a man, if his fiancée is married by someone else.

Sarabjit Singh opines that murder is the way for Nahari to restore his reputation and self-respect. Aulakh also uses lines from the folk ballads of Ghukar Mal and Suchha Surma which romanticise this tradition of revenge and connect the act of Nahari with the much larger traditional historical context of Punjabi culture.

After the murder of Bhangra by Nahari, the family lands in a financial crisis and Bachna's elder son has to work as a labourer in someone else's fields. But for younger Dhindi, to work as a farm labourer is below the dignity of a Jat. “ਪਰਾਂਹ ਰੱਖ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਦੀ ਜੂਠ ਨੂੰ! ਮੈਂ ਸੀਰੀ-ਸੱਪੜਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਟੁੱਕੜ ਖਾਣ ਨੂੰ ਨੀਂ ਜੰਮਿਆ ਮਾਂ ਨੇ!” Keep away the leftovers of people. I am not born to eat the leftovers meant for labour class (73-74).

Bachna too is not devoid of the feelings of false Jat pride in him. He also does not like his son Karma working as farm labourer in someone else's fields, although he knows that Karma is doing it under economic compulsions. He wants to improve the financial status of the family and there is no other alternative. Karma curses his life under feelings of distress.

ਕਰਮਾ: (ਚਿੜ ਕੇ) ਜ਼ਿੰਦਗੀ? ਕਿਹੜੀ ਜ਼ਿੰਦਗੀ ਦੀ ਗੱਲ ਕਰਦੈਂ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਧਰਮ ਸਿਆਂ! ਆਹ ਇਕ ਟੁੱਕ ਦੀ ਬੁਰਕੀ ਦੀ ? ਜਿਹੜੀ ਸਾਲੀ ਦਰ 'ਤੇ ਆਏ ਕੁੱਤੇ ਨੂੰ ਵੀ ਨਸੀਬ ਹੋ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਐ!

KARMA. (Annoyed) Life? What life are you talking about, Dharm Siyan? All this life entails is a piece of bread? Which even a poor dog can acquire! (72)

Ajmer Singh Aulakh does not forget to mention the importance of a woman in the life of a man in his play *Sat Begane*. Women have been portrayed in a very

miserable plight, under the yoke of tyranny of the feudal mindset and male dominated society. But one should understand that by suppressing a woman physically, no one can suppress her emotions, or feelings or her soul. Lakadchab too understands the importance of a woman in a man's life and says to Karma: “ਨੰਘਣ ਨੂੰ ਤਾਂ ਨੰਘ ਜੂ ਕਰਮਿਆ ਪਰ ਤੀਵੀਂ ਬਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਘਰ ਭੂਤਾਂ ਦਾ ਵਾਸਾ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ। (71). The life can be passed but life without a woman is like a house haunted by ghosts.

There are two female characters who play an important role in this play. First is Jaikur, who is worried that if her brother in law, Bhanga, gets married it will lead to the partition of property and her sons would get only half of the land. Second cause of her worry is the marriage of her four sons. However, everything happens against her wishes. Throughout her married life, she strives to keep Bhanga happy so that he does not need another woman in his life. Ultimately she feels cheated by Bhanga when Bhanga alleges that she and her husband (his own brother) are responsible for making his life hell.

ਭੰਗਾ: ਹਸਾਬ- ਕਤਾਬ? ਬੁਰਕੀ ਟੁੱਕ ਦੀ ਤੇ ਦੇ ਤਨ ਦੇ ਲੀੜਿਆਂ ਤੋਂ ਬਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਈ ਕੀ ਐ?

ਜੈ ਕੁਰ: ਅਜੇ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਈ ਕੁਸ਼ ਨੀ? ਬਗਾਨੀ ਧੀ ਦੀ ਦੇਹ...

ਭੰਗਾ: ... ਜਦੋਂ ਮੈਂ ਛੋਟਾ ਸੀ ਤਾਂ ਕਤੂਰਾ ਸਮਝ ਕੇ ਪੁੱਚ-ਪੁੱਚ ਕਰਕੇ ਰੋਟੀਂ ਪਾਉਂਦੀ ਰਹੀ! ਜਦੋਂ ਮਛੋਰ ਹੋਇਆ ਤਾਂ, ਮਛੋਰ-ਮਤ ਨੂੰ ਆਪਣੀਆਂ ਮੋਮੋਠਗਣੀਆਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਫਸਾ ਲਿਆ! ਤੁਸੀਂ ਤੀਮੀਂ-ਖਸਮ ਨੇ ਆਪਣੀ ਗਰਜ਼ ਖਾਤਰ ਮੇਰੀ ਜਿੰਦਗੀ...

BHANGA. Accounts what accounts? What have you given me besides a piece of bread and rags for clothes.

JAIKUR. Haven't I given you anything? Didn't I let you have my body...

BHANGA. When I was a child you used to throw me a piece of bread like to a puppy. When I grew young you trapped me in your manoeuvres. You husband and wife have destroyed my life for your own ulterior motives. (47)

“Jaikur is not like Bhuti or Bishni who bear and tolerate everything. (Atamjit 52).” She has dared, at least, to disobey her parents while marrying Bachna. Besides, she is bold enough to talk about the illicit relationships going on in her village. Though she does this talk under the psychological pressure yet the determination of doing so, reflects her courage and initiative.

Another female character in this play is Mindho who gets married to Ghoga in spite of the fact that she likes Nahari and is in relation with him. She is sexually dissatisfied with Ghoga. When a woman finds her own satisfaction outside her home, our society blames her and no one questions the male counterpart. Ajmer Singh Aulakh has presented this problem in his play through the example of Mindho. She is married to that person who is younger to her. Due to this age factor, she does not derive any satisfaction from her husband and she surrenders herself and makes sexual relationship with Nahari. Through this character, Aulakh brings to fore the fact that if a woman does not get a husband of her own choice, she can go to the extent of throwing away the norms, cultural values and can go to another man for sexual gratification. As she states:

ਮਿੰਦ੍ਹੋ: ਰੋਣਾ ਤਾਂ ਐਸੇ ਗੱਲ ਦੈ! ਜੇ ਘੋਗਾ ਭਾਂਬੜ ਬਣ ਕੇ ਮੱਚਣ ਆਲਾ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਮੈਂ ਪਰਾਈ ਅੱਗ 'ਚ ਕਿਉਂ ਹੱਡਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਬਾਲਣ ਬਾਲਦੀ?

MINDHO. That's the cause of trouble! If Ghoga would have been aggressive like a fire why would I resort to other people? (Aulakh, Sat 52)

Her relationship with Nahari is not only physical, but emotional also. That is the reason behind his continuing support to Nahari's family even after his death. This makes her stand out as a daring and bold woman. Jaikur and Mindho represent the class of women committed to the man they love. They are ready to surrender and sacrifice everything they owe for their love without giving any importance to socio-cultural values. They clearly express their wish to stay with their commitments. Jaikur accompanies Bachana throughout her life while Mindho sells all her ornaments to save Nahari and his brothers during trial. She says, 'ਮੋਹ-ਮੁਹੱਬਤਾਂ ਮੂਹਰੇ ਇਹ ਗਹਿਣੇ-ਗੱਟੇ ਕੀ ਚੀਜ਼ਾਂ ਨੇ ਨਾਹਰੀ! ਪਰ ਇਹ ਗਹਿਣੇ-ਗੱਟੇ ਕੀ ਫੁਕਾਂ ਜਦ ਤੈਨੂੰ ਈ...What is the value of ornaments in comparison to love and affection! What is the use of these ornaments if I lose you (61). Nahari and his family are like 'her own' for Mindho. She has no direct relation with them but due to her love for Nahari, she considers them as her own.

After the death of Nahari, downfall of the family continues unabated. They are still struggling to make both ends meet by any means, and marriage is still an unachievable dream for them. Absence of a spouse in their life haunts them and they try to fill this void by singing a folk form *boli* at the end of the play, "ਕੁਸ਼ ਨੀਂ ਭਰਾਵੋਂ

ਜੁਨਾਂ ਘਰ ਦੀ ਨਾਰ ਬਿਨਾਂ, ਕੁਸ਼ ਨੀਂ...” life is nothing without a woman...life is nothing... (76). In “*Sat Begane da Thimak Adheyan*”, Amarjit Singh Kaang illustrates,

The theme of the play *Sat Begane* is explicit in the statements of its characters near the end of the play. Life of a man is considered incomplete without a woman. His future is shaped through his relationship with a woman. Life meets tragedy when a man is diverted from the normal path of his life and gets involved in doing some heinous act which spoils his entire life. (121)

In *Meri Shreshat Rachana* Aulakh writes that he has portrayed his characters and their different situations on the basis of reality. They are the reflections of real life (Aulakh, Sahitik 52).

Ajmer Singh Aulakh has emerged as a strong and refined writer of small scale farmers. His writings are almost free from romanticism and idealism. His plays and writings are graced with the realities of life because his main objective is not only to present the harsh realities of life but also to give a new direction for the emancipation of the community. This study unfolds many layers which are inter-related with each other. Moral- immoral relations are formed out of the economic burdens. He presents the effects of economic change over the relationships in a family, society and culture. He also presents the social, economic and psychological pressures being faced by small farmers in a realistic manner.

The cultural aspect of his writing has another important aspect through which he attempts to present the psychology and mental outlook of the *Malwai* people. Cultural values are the identification marks of the people and their life in a specified geographical area. The journey of life and its values have been dealt with by Aulakh in a very effective way.

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CHAPTER 3

Night of the Half Moon: Tragedy of Honour, Revenge and Greed

Gurdial Singh is one of the most prominent, respected and well-known Punjabi fiction writers today. He was born on January 10, 1933 at Bhaini Fateh, a village near Jaito in district Faridkot, Punjab. In an interview he describes his family background: "I was born in an ordinary family of carpenters which had no high status in Punjabi or Indian society" (Sharma 9). He has been writing fiction and non-fiction for nearly fifty years and has published ten novels, a number of plays, nearly a dozen books for children, and numerous articles in different newspapers and magazines. For his contribution to Punjabi fiction, he has been awarded the Jnanpith award (1999), the highest honour for creative writing in India. Most of his work has been translated into various Indian and foreign languages. His novels *Marhi da diva* as *The Last Flicker*, *Adh Chanani Raat* as *Night of the Half Moon*, *Parsa* under the same name, and *Annhoje* as *Survivors* have been translated and published in English.

Gurdial Singh has passionately presented the stress of human minds through the centuries. Most of his novels are concerned with the period of Green Revolution when on one side, feudalism was still in existence and on the other hand, commercialization of agriculture according to capitalist pattern had already begun. Therefore, the individuals were going through a period of turbulence due to substitution of old moral and social values with relatively amoral attitude. The main reason for this change may have been the shift in whole economic system as all social life is ingrained in economic set up.

Gurdial Singh is considered a pioneer of realism in modern Punjabi fiction. He has successfully depicted the changes along with the crisis at the time of the shift, arising out in Punjab from feudalism to capitalism. He has depicted the changing relations between individuals and their crises due to economic upheavals with special reference to *Malwai* fraternity. Gurdial Singh's novels reveal the real life experience of rural middle class as well as lower class. "Gurdial Singh radicalised the Punjabi novel by infusing it with a new consciousness about the underprivileged and the oppressed" (Nayar 233).. Gurpal Singh Sandhu, writes

that novels of Gurdial Singh strike a fine balance between progressive ideologies and basic determinative references by associating with humanitarian ideas (73).

His first short story was published in 1957 but his real break in the literary world came with the publication of his first novel *Marhi da Diva* in 1964. That novel proved to be a significant milestone and trend-setter in the history of Punjabi novel.

Commenting upon his novel *Marhi da Diva*, Namwar Singh, an eminent Hindi critic, writes, 'When the novel was a dying art-form in Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was Tolstoy's *War and Peace* that resurrected faith in the novel as a form. In a similar fashion, when in Indian languages novel was going through its worst ever crisis, Gurdial Singh's *Marhi da Diva* revitalised this form as only he could' (qtd. in Nayar 233).

Dr. Attar Singh while highlighting the importance of this novel established some fundamental presumptions which became the foundations of study of this novel. Dr. T. R. Vinod addresses this novel as a tragic end of traditional rural fraternity (qtd. in Rajinder 66).

It is clear that *Marhi da Diva* is such a pioneer novel in which Gurdial Singh skillfully elaborates declining pattern of social-economic set up and highlights the tragic life style of landless class through capitalism and in reference to historic-cultural contexts. Dr. Joginder Singh Rahi observes,

Gurdial Singh's novels are indicators of tragic experience based on real experience which brings about a fundamental change in the traditional way of presentation of personal grief. (66)

Gurdial Singh has presented the tragedies of feudalistic crisis through the characters of Jagseer, Nandi, Ronaki, Dharam Singh in his narrative *Marhi da Diva*. This was his first novel and it draws a real picture of cultural crisis of caste-class system in the background of feudalism. The story is based on the relations between landless farmers and landowners. His writings deal with complex social, cultural and economic forces at work in the rural Malwa region of Punjab in the second half of the twentieth century.

He portrays the tragedy and inevitability of the slow but certain process of transformation of feudal social system into a capitalist order. He has seen the society change around him and is pained to see the lack of human sympathy and understanding in the new world

order. He is a good reader and translator. His reading and interest in classical works of literature gave him a larger perspective and an awareness of the aesthetic principles and techniques of the great realist literature of the nineteenth century. (Ramana 109)

The Night of the Half Moon (1972) is one of his famous novels. Gurdial Singh was conferred with Sahitya Akademi award for this novel. Dr. Rahi says in the context of *Night of the Half Moon*, "This novel has been considered the first successful tragic novel in Punjabi" (qtd in Rajinder 66). As Darshan Singh Maini expresses in introduction to *Night of the Half Moon*, the three basic issues dealt with by the author are "land, woman and honour" (Gurdial vii).

The novel *Night of the Half Moon* is a tragic tale of an innocent, self-respecting and courageous *Malwai* Jat Sikh's struggle and suffering as he tries to protect the self-respect, family honour and challenge in his simple individual manner, it portrays capitalist values overriding upon socio-cultural set up of Punjab's feudalistic set up. In it, he draws an individualistic picture of realities and cultural crisis based on friction evolving out of social relations and interests in rural life style.

He portrayed the lives and problems of marginal and small Jat farmers of Malwa region of Punjab. "...Gurdial Singh's very first novel shifted the narrative focus to the 'margins' of Punjabi society and introduced, in terms of thematic concerns, a socially conscious realism based on minute observation of the complex social structure of the rural Punjab. (Ramana 108)

Moddan who is the protagonist of the novel *Night of the Half Moon* is a small farmer. The story of novel is an individualistic one and in the end it becomes a sensitive portrayal of a society undergoing a process of complex socio-economic transformation. Forced by circumstances, he commits a murder and faces life-imprisonment. After being released he tries to get his life back on the track, but fails to do so. He feels lonely in his life because he has less land and due to his jail-history, it is very difficult for him to get married. This novel is located in the nineteen fifties and sixties. The novel focuses mainly on the life of Moddan and his relationship with his family.

The story begins with unjustified and humiliating arrest and imprisonment of Moddan's father, Pala Singh, a hard-working farmer who tries his best to avoid any conflict. The jealous malicious neighbours cannot bear Pala live in peace with his

wife and three young sons. To avoid any conflict, Pala leaves his house in the village to shift to another house which is called the outer house in the field. But the scheming rivals do not let him live and conniving with the police send some suspicious characters to seek shelter and spend a night at Pala's house in the fields.

Pala is accused of sheltering fugitives and is humiliated and tortured in front of his wife and young sons. Taya Laalu tells Moddan, the enemies of his family bear a grudge against them for some past incidents involving Moddan's grand-uncle, Sauna. They were looking for an opportunity to take their revenge and, finding gentle Pala an easy target, have conspired to trap him in a concocted legal case. The legal battle eats up all their resources and ends up in conviction of Pala Singh for a crime he did not commit. His one and a half year long imprisonment completely destroys the poor man psychologically and mentally and he dies a broken man within months after his release from prison. Moddan, who becomes the head of his family after his father's conviction, is taunted and provoked by some villagers like Gyala and Sheri to take revenge to protect the family honour. "We Jats never let go of the past...The cock, the crow and the Bania preserve their tribe, but the bull, the crocodile and the Jat destroy their own" (Singh, Night 33).

Moddan accepts the challenge and kills Ghana Nambardar to 'protect his honour' and to avenge his father's humiliation and he is convicted and imprisoned for fourteen years. When Moddan comes out of jail, the situation has changed completely. His younger brother Sajjan, heading the family since his imprisonment, does not have the sense of dignity and family honour. Moddan feels betrayed and alienated from everyone. The girl he had been engaged to for seven years is married to someone else and he has no one except Ruldu, his only friend and well-wisher, that he can call his own. Moddan decides to part ways with his younger brothers and shifts to the outhouse with his mother Harkur. But Moddan's problems don't end there. Ruldu buys a woman Daani for his friend. He mortgages his own land to arrange the money for the purpose.

After a short glimpse of happy family life lasting a few months, Moddan is cheated by Daani's mean relatives and she is sold again to someone rather influential in a far off village. Moddan challenges his enemies once again in a drunken state and is wounded by a blow from his own brother fighting on behalf of

his enemies. The wound does not heal but he refuses to complain against Sajjan and dies soon afterwards, a completely lonely man with the only solace that his friend Ruldu has stood by him till the very end and that Daani has come all by herself on the last night of his life to see him one last time.

Night of the Half Moon reflects the relationship of Moddan with society because literature and society are inseparable. The stressful relations of human beings with nature also lead him to enter into further stressful relations with the society. Thus, literature emerges out of strained relations of human beings with their society. A person in this society never gets what he wants. To fulfill his wishes, he formulates certain faith, determination and principles and then remains active to achieve them. In this novel, Moddan avenges his father's death for maintaining his reputation in the society and to live his life with self-respect which results into his imprisonment. The faith, determination and principles develop from a value or perception and then derive their ultimate shape from the society. In *Sahit te Chintan* T. R. Vinod considers, "A novel interprets the economic and cultural values of our day to day life through specific cultural methods" (30).

The economic and cultural aspects of Punjabi life-style are based on class and caste system. These are related to each other. Presentation of rural life certainly requires in-depth experience. This requirement has been extensively complied with in the novels of Gurdial Singh. Most of his novels represent the realities of rural life of Punjab have attained a great success.

'Honour' enjoys a misguided glorification in our social reality. The novel revolves around Moddan who has been presented as a person with a false notion of honour. Moddan is living in such a society where either he should take revenge of his father's murder, and then be known as 'self-respected Jat' or he should be called 'coward' by avoiding the situation. Moddan deliberates on the recognition of honour as an essence of life but there are many other factors responsible for imbibing the feeling of honour in his mind: "The man who does not avenge his fathers and fore-fathers is not a man" (Singh, Night 37).

Moddan has to choose between survival and honour and he opts for protecting his honour and takes revenge by murdering Ghana Numbardar. However, as he murders the Numbardar for ensuring his self-respect, it does not change his image in the society and the society moves on. As the eldest son of Pala Singh, he applies his limited reason and concludes that it is a matter of

honour for him to take revenge for the death of his father. Many questions concerning 'honour' arise in his mind. "...if someone sells himself to his enemies, would you call him a man?" (71).

Although Moddan is aware of the consequences of his acts, yet honour is an irreconcilable issue in the society. The existence of a human being is based on his social acceptance, that is why Moddan thinks: "When integrity is lost, self-respect and honour are lost. Can property help retrieve it? What do you do with the property?" (49).

The vital theme of this novel is the deteriorating life of an agriculturist due to which the cultural danger is increasing day by day. Joginder Singh Rahi articulates in *Gurdial Singh Abhinandan Granth* in the context of this narrative,

Night of the Half Moon is a novel representing cultural tragedy of the moral decline of our agriculturist society which is at the cross roads of economic decline. (117)

Jalour Singh observes that this novel postures the cultural endangering of a declining agricultural society (29). The crisis of the novel *Night of the Half Moon* is unlike the crisis faced by 'Jagseer' in '*Marhi da Diva*', in fact, it arises from the issue of murder in feudalistic rural society.

The problem is related to the proclivity towards 'personal property'. An individual is mentally prepared to behave in an inhuman way to fulfill his desire to increase his inclination and love for 'personal property'. An individual remains unaware of the results arising out of his inhuman conduct. The major reason of this tragedy is their lack of awareness. The attachment with personal property and the wish to increase it reflects from the behavior of Ghanekyan's sons. The reason of differences between Moddan and Sajjan is Ghanekyan's policy which is aimed at enlarging their land by hook or crook. The misfortune of Moddan is that he, throughout his life, makes an attempt to live his life in an ordered and pleasant way but does not succeed.

Ghanekyan's greed for land is opposed by Pala Singh's uncle. With the passage of time, Ghanekyan is frustrated due to non-fulfillment of his desire. He uses many tactics which ultimately result in the death of Pala Singh.

The importance of pride in the Punjabi society shows in this narrative. When Ruldu and Moddan meet and reflect on their intimate feelings and concerns,

they discover that they have the same approach towards life and nature of a Jat community and importance of pride in the Punjabi society:

Man makes property; but that property can't bring back a dead man.
You are born only once. So what's the point in becoming a lakhpati if
one can't even guard one's sense of honour...money even the
prostitutes have. (Singh, Night 49)

Night of the Half Moon depicts the crisis of the declining economic structure of our society which has its own reasons. Due to these reasons, the whole culture is implicated in a critical situation. The capitalist relations are being established at a lower level in our society which has led to the abolition of neither feudalistic system in Punjabi society nor feudalistic perceptions. This crisis has been presented by Gurdial Singh in his various novels. Joginder Singh Rahi says in *Gurdial Singh Abhinandan Granth*,

The important fact of the novelistic world of Gurdial Singh is that he is novelist who favours the stability in life rather than its dynamicity. (118)...in the novel *Night of the Half Moon*, the novelist inter-relates experience arising of economic stability with the crisis of cultural complexity. (178)

This novel presents the paradigm shift in the human values along with the crisis of declining economy. The protagonist in this novel belongs to labour class. However, his nature distinguishes him from his class. Dr. Rajinder Singh considers him as a sensitive character and relates his sensitivity to his self-respect (101). The character of Moddan possesses all merits and demerits which are usually attached to personality of Jat community like attachment with land, ego, self-respect, enmity. His sensitivity, determination, satisfaction and kindness present him as a distinct character. In this way, Moddan's character comprises of ordinary as well as distinct characteristics (101).

Moddan has also a desire to live his life with self-respect and honour approved with the culture prevailing at the time. However, it does not seem possible for him to live with those values as the community to which he belongs, is affected by the oppression of capitalist urban culture. This culture is transforming the social relations as well as cultural values. In a society, the values like 'self-respect' and 'honour' suffer due to friction with the economically giant interests of

owning the property. This friction leads to tragedies for an ordinary human being. In *Punjabi Novel da Sanskritik Aadheyan* Dr. T. R. Vinod observes,

The crisis of *Night of the Half Moon* derives its sustenance from the crisis arising out of effect of capitalism on the inter-family and intra family of landowners. The ownership of family has an important place in feudal system. However, the cultural importance of self-respect and reputation of family is also given due importance as economic interests are surrendered to protect them. (120)

Self-respect and economic interests of only those few people are respected in such a social system who have economic, social and political powers of society (Singh, Gurdial 145). The values of self-respect and honour of an ordinary person not only affect his economic status but also create familial and social instabilities for him as Dr. Rajinder Singh opines:

Firstly, the values of self-respect and honour, inspite of being a part of social enlightenment, are confined to personal level which leads to a rise in the level of stress between individual and society. Secondly, these values are associated not only with the emotions of individual but also related with the stress of economic downfall. Thirdly, the historic phase in the plot of novel portrays the decline in these values due to emergence of contrasting values. (102)

Above referred reasons make it clear that Moddan is influenced by the issue of living his life with self-respect and honour. Therefore, he commits murder and is compelled to live an honourless life of a convict. He faces all the stringent circumstances in his life with determination and courage due to which he emerges as a protagonist of the novel. However, he is not aware of the class culture and arrogant approach of the landholders who contributes significantly in the evolution of such stringent circumstances. Due to this unawareness, Moddan could not find the ways to transform the social structure.

Lack of adequate awareness is the problem not only of Moddan but also of the whole society. The crisis faced by Moddan is compared by Dr. Rajinder Singh with the Punjabi verse '*Sapp de Mooh aayi Kohar Kiri*' which reflects dilemma on the part of the subject neither to eat nor to leave. Nonetheless, Moddan prefers to eat instead of leaving and suffers from the consequences which is the tragedy with Moddan. In this regard, Dr. Rahi states,

...tragedies always occur in the social world that is based on relations and values. Cultural approaches...disturbance in the balance based on economic grounds along with cultural changes add the complexities and diversity of tragedies. (114)

The main cause of Moddan's situation is economic as it is related with extension of his personal property. But the party tries to extend the property moving on the path of declining moral values and bases their stand on dishonesty and suppression resulting in cultural deterioration' (Singh, Navalkar 103).

Gurdial Singh portrays the economic condition of the Punjabi society in this novel with the reference of Ghuda Tunda when he and Moddan talk about the experience of jail life. He has his own approach towards life. He addresses jail as maternal home where one has no need to be worried about domestic affairs as he says:

...I am at home here. I don't need to scrounge around for a living, or worry about clothes and shelter. Why, one lives in this place like an honoured guest...if I were at home, I'd be running about hither and thither planting and watering the fields at odd times, even in the dead of winter, but here –what luxury! Eat, sleep, wake and work, all at the proper time...I had a wife of sorts who was taken over by my younger brother shortly after I came here. (Singh, Night 2)

Presenting the deplorable condition of poor, the novelist shows how life outside jail is more difficult for them and they have no control over their fate.

Looking towards the last generation, it can be pointed out that Ghana Numbardar is in fact, a cousin of Moddan's father Pala. The family of Ghana Numbardar has adequate amount of land holdings while the family of Pala has only limited land which enables his family to live a hand to mouth existence. The two Jat families *Ghane-Ke* and *Pale-Ke* are in conflict but Ghana's family has more land than Pala; therefore, they are comparatively stronger. On the basis of their strength, they want revenge for insult of their ancestors caused by Pala's side; and they shrewdly murder Pala. He was a wise man. "He was, as they say, like the bull, you know, solid and hard-working. All his life he worked hard, and was thrifty too" (32).

There are two reasons of enmity between Ghana Numbardar and Pala's family: first is the desire to expand landownership and the second is the notion of

honour in their community. The uncle of Ghana's father had entrusted their land to Ghana's father. Ghana's family has been reaping the benefits of this land for 15-20 years. When the uncle dies, his sons demand their land back. However, Ghana and his sons show them the forged deeds of land and claim that this land was mortgaged. But uncle's sons request the Panchyat to mediate. In this process of mediation and resolving the dispute on the basis of right and wrong by the members of Panchyat (who are the ancestors of Moddan's father's fore-fathers), Moddan's ancestor Sauna earns name and fame. The whole village looks at him with great respect.

...Moddan's great-grandfather was a highly respected man in the village...he would resolve any land and family disputes...he was an utterly honest and upright man. He would not favour even a relative of his if one were involved, and would not bow to pressure from anyone. (34)

Due to this conflict, Sauna is abused by Ghana Numbardar's ancestors. This matter is brought to the notice of the emperor through Court. The whole village favours Sauna and due to the lenient approach of Sauna, the dispute is resolved in an agreement. Nonetheless, the Ghana Numbardar's ancestors keep the grudge which ultimately leads to dispute between the two families. Baba Sauna is a reputed and honest person of the village. Ghana Numbardar's ancestors lose their land as well as their honour. Their frustration brings them in conflict with Pala who is a temperate person and they kill him.

Being the eldest son of Pala, Moddan faces many difficulties. He is expected to shoulder various responsibilities. After the death of Pala, Moddan is incriminated in various tragedies. The rural fraternity especially Jats consider that now Moddan has the responsibility to look after all the matters concerning Pala's family. Moddan becomes the head of family after his father's death.

As per the values of Punjabi culture, the eldest son of the family becomes the head who is considered to be responsible for the welfare of the whole family and in lieu of which the whole family pays respect to him (Vinod 20).

As the head of the family, it is the responsibility of Moddan to bring out his family from the hold of humiliation by using his wit (Rajinder 107). He prefers to get even with Ghanekyan's family to preserve the ties of his family. Otherwise he

would have been branded a coward in his community. He is determined to live his life like a man of honour and reputation in the society.

Moddan wants to do something for restoration of the self-respect of the family in the village, but he does not share it with anyone of his family members. He wants to go alone on this path...though the grief of Pala's family is equally for all members, but reaction to the demise of Pala's, is sole of Moddan. (Singh, Adh 97)

Undoubtedly, the whole family is mourning the death of Pala, but as head of the family, Moddan owes the responsibility to erase the social humiliation of his father's murder. Moddan is a sensitive character. Thus, his psyche is influenced by the cruel and inhuman treatment of Police with his family members. In the novel the novelist also shows the behavior of Police with those people who are powerless:

"...Maim this fellow! Strip the woman naked...!"... "This bloody caste sure has the cheek to flout procedures!" grinding his teeth, the sub-inspector pushed Moddan's mother so hard that she nearly lost her balance and fell against the wall of the courtyard. Stepping forward, he pulled at Pala's beard as hard as he could, before raining down a hail of *lathi*-blows on his bare back. (40)

Moddan feels that the burden is twofold; he wants to save his family and also to avenge his rivalry with Ghana's family. Though he is not interested in carrying on this enmity yet as a member of Jat community, there is no tradition of forgetting the enmity in his culture. So, Ghana is murdered by Moddan.

The whole village and Moddan know that the main culprits of Pala's murder are Ghana and his family. Moddan gets disheartened due to the humiliation faced by Moddan's family because of unfair imprisonment of Pala. Though, Moddan took over the responsibility of his family during the imprisonment of Pala and after his death, yet he feels that it is a kind of humiliation for him and his family not to avenge his death. The social pressure of this humiliation and realization of the pain his mother has to undergo incites Moddan to take revenge from Ghana's family.

The social and cultural atmosphere of the society in which Moddan has been brought up and living, 'revenge' is deemed as an approved value to preserve socio-culture existence, to give halt to the

excesses by the dominant class and to live life like a respected person. (Singh, Navalkar 106)

Dr. Joginder Singh Rahi states about the 'notion of revenge' in the article "*Aadh Chanani Raat te Trasad-samvedna*" that a person who gives up the idea of ancestral revenge, cannot be included among men of honour. A dishonourable person has to tolerate derision and taunts. The contempt and disparagement make a person's life lonely and worse than death. (111).

Moddan is a brave guy. His character possesses all the virtues which must be possessed by person of self-respect. He cannot live his life in humiliation. His self-respect and the reputation of his family can only be saved if he goes for vengeance for the innocent murder of his father. To live life with self-respect and to save his family from humiliation and degradation, it is imperative for him to go for this tragic end of his life (125). In "*Adh Chanani Raat da Thimak Adheyan*" Dr. Harbhajan Singh points out that,

Moddan does not murder under the effect of any kind of instigation since he had already made the arrangement for the pistol before his meeting with Lalu. The Conclusion appears that he has not committed murder due to instigation rather he has murdered on account of his internal compulsion. (100)

Moddan has an illusion in his mind that after vengeance he would be able to live his life with self-respect and honour, his family would be obliged by his act of murdering Ghana and thereby pay him more respect. However, the factual situation is contrary. No one besides Ruldu appreciates Moddan's violent act. In fact, Moddan's family feels itself caught in an unwanted disaster.

People react differently to Moddan's act of violence: some appear sympathetic while others disparage his act stating it to be foolish. All the individuals do not have similar approach towards culture and society. It is developed differently through socio-economic and mental ability of each individual. It explicitly appears from the conversation of Ruldu and Mirab.

...true son of his mother he has proved himself to be ... "People are only good at making claims about their personal courage...but not many would dare to do what he has done" ... "How dare you support him?" ... "I know you are half responsible for Moddan's act of 'bravery.' If you consider yourself a friend, why don't you go and help

out with the family's harvesting now? They will realize their mistake when the court case opens. The land will have to be sold off; both the sons will be ruined. Then they will know what it is to kill someone... (49)

Kishan Singh analyses this conversation and points out that in the modern social context, lower middle class faces two contradictory choices: whether to look after their land or to manage the affairs of honour. Secondly, only persons like Meerab, Namma Budha can afford to plan long term profit in property and look after their domestic affairs while persons like Ruldu, who talk of self-respect, live their life from hand to mouth. Thirdly, resourceful persons like Meerab reveal the factual situation of society where economics defines life. The status of a person is decided by his property. On the other hand, the people like Ruldu living for self-respect prefer to go by social values. They appreciate labour and encourage humanity (131-132).

Despite the moral force behind Ruldu's approach, his attitude appears conservative. Moddan too therefore comes in conflict with moral values in a society governed by capitalist sovereign. Consequently, he faces a catastrophe. While moving with the time, Ghana's sons avail the benefit of their father's murder. It clearly reveals the transforming values and perceptions of society in changing times. They collaborate with Pala's relatives and get Sajjan acquitted in the trial while Moddan is sentenced for 14 years. "...These people send for Harkur's brothers and sign a secret agreement with them. Now during the next demarcation, they will stake a claim on half of the land. As a result, their share will go up by another four acres" (Singh, Night 64). Here Gurdial Singh portrays how the people improve their economic circumstances.

Besides, once you are down and out, you lose all your dignity. Do you think Pala's sons would ever be able to muster enough dignity to survive? Never! ...they can never regain it. (64)

The above conversation throws light on the importance of 'land' in Punjabi society. "Land is not related to economic life but their emotions and feelings are also related to it. These feelings become the basis of their life" (Singh, Lekhak 38). Man puts his best efforts to increase his land and, in pursuit of his aim, does not take care of society and its people. The man who has the power in his hand has name and fame in society. With the passage of time, society is becoming corrupt

day by day. The main reason of this corruption is emergence of capitalist trend. Gurdial Singh has expressed his concern through the characters of corrupt *Police*, *Patwari*, *Tehsildar*, *Kanungo* etc. in his narrative.

Almost every morning, the patwari was at their house, and not once would he go back without drinking his usual glass of thick, creamy milk with ghee added to it. The tehsildar had his mare left at their stable where she would always get fresh gram to munch. And the kanungo would simply plonk himself at their doorstep daily, and help himself to a bottle of liquor and fried chicken...Now tell me, who else could have staked a claim on that strip of fertile land? (Singh, Night 64)

At the time of consolidation of land holdings, Ghana's sons appropriate a piece of the fertile land close to the ravine; they also arrange to buy off the adjoining field for a fourth of its actual price because they have power. But they justify their own action in the eyes of the people; they help Pala's sons buy a strip of about half an acre around the same place. Everyone, from the patwari to tehsildar, is bribed heavily so that they can have it all their own way.

We see situation of corruption once again in the novel when Ruldu and Moddan want to install new *tubewell* before the summer season but when Ruldu proceeds to the officers for approval, he feels that the approval cannot be obtained without bribe. He gets frustrated by the pathetic and corrupt behavior of officials and concludes, "This won't get done until we take a 'do-or-die' vow and put the screws on them. You will see how readily they'll acknowledge us as their Chacha... You'll see it all... with your own eyes... this is the only way you can get things through...Yes!" (117).

The characters of Gurdial Singh's novel are found caught in such predicaments arising out of this gap which becomes so grave sometimes that the socio-cultural values are suppressed under the weight of economic base. When cultural values become obstacles in the way of economic growth, these play an important role because the base of social values is the economy. Due to change in the economy, social changes do occur. However, the change in the social values is comparatively slower than in cultural values. This is the reason that the gap between economic base and cultural scenario continues (Singh, Navalkar 111).

The irony of Moddan's situation is that he considers traditional values as the basis of his life. During his imprisonment, his younger brothers get married. After collaborating with Ghana's sons and acquiring water for the purpose of irrigation of their land, they renovate their house from the income earned out of the crops. Henceforth Moddan feels different at home after being released from prison. The destruction of their outer home is an indication of the separation of the family members of Moddan.

The disaster for Moddan is that he murdered Ghana for restoring prestige of his family and enabling his family to live with 'honour' in society. However, the label of 'murderer' does not absolve him from the grip of adversities of life. He himself realizes this when he has to enter his own residence with covered face. He does not come out of his house for two- three days. It is clear that whether murder is caused by keeping in view the social values of self-respect and honour yet these social values subsequently prove a person guilty as realised by Moddan himself.

To save the honour of his family, Moddan makes a sacrifice and expects respect from the member of his family in return. Nonetheless, Moddan's faith is shattered when he finds none to receive him either at the jail gate or railway station.

Night of the Half Moon explicitly also presents changing human values in society. On returning after serving the sentence, he learns that his people, even his brothers have become self-centered. None of his brothers goes to receive him and he feels that he does not have anyone. After reaching the village, the changed picture of the village affords him the glimpse of economic progress under capitalist effect. Moddan's brother Sajjan befriends Ghanekyan's sons for his economic gain. This friendship insults his self-respect. Sajjan does so to attain a special status in the society and rather considers Moddan the cause of their falling reputation. Therefore, he also attacks Moddan in one instance. The novelist has explained the transformation in the social values of a capitalist society through the character of 'Sajjan' in novel *Night of the Half Moon*. Moddan gets annoyed at the behavior of Sajjan as his changed outlook hurts him. Due to Sajjan's friendship with Ghana's sons, he feels unwilling to continue his relationship with Sajjan.

Moddan does not appreciate Sajjan's intimacy with Ghana's successors and states that they did not do well by collaborating with enemies and they will surely repent for this decision. It seems disagreeable for him that his own brothers

have developed relations with the murderers of his father. Nonetheless he cannot alienate himself from his real brothers. All the illusions of Moddan wither away. He understands that his brothers are trying to get rid of him (112). However, he is willing to live his life content with his personal notions of self-respect and honour.

The capitalist society influences the socio-cultural values in rural platform as the enmity is born out of the urge to increase property as well as to strengthen the economy. Moral values have deteriorated to such an extent that the shrewd persons in order to fulfill their selfish ends leave their wives for others. There is no place or importance of values and honesty in a capitalist society; novelist illustrates here condition of women as well as importance of land in the Punjabi society.

...the fact is that they have laid a trap for Sajjan...what do you think makes off to Ghanna's younger son Karnail's house every day? That Kaila, he too is bastard!-And the one he's brought home, they say, is the daughter of a Muslim woman-someone who had been a keep of Jat from the pre-partition days in Pakistan-shameless creatures-all of them!...When one has lost one's honour, can anything possibly help matters? (Singh, Night 123)

Moddan gets angry when he hears about the behavior of Sajjan, "If that's the way it is, I'm going to destroy their very seed...nothing less than this would do" (124). Moddan wants to go by his personal notions of honour and social values at any cost. He aspires to strengthen his economic status through hard work. After divide between Moddan and Sajjan, Moddan does not have money as well as tools, cart. He begins farming with a few old tools given by his friend Ruldu. His land used to be irrigated with the water from Ghanekyan's tube well Moddan decides to discontinue this option of water supply. . "Let those gram and sarson flowers wilt for want of water. I'm not going to use the water of those butchers (82). It is clear from this occurrence that Moddan is committed to live his life independently and respectfully. This fact can be witnessed in the conversation between Moddan and Ruldu:

...this land and property will all be left behind, but a man without honour and self-respect is as good as naught. His life is a deadly curse...It's not a matter of livelihood alone-as far as that goes, even

cats and dogs know how to scrounge for a meal...how else is a man different from other lowly animals?(82)

Ghana's sons do not mend their ways. They have encroached upon the land of Moddan by increasing the boundaries. Moddan is not in favour of any clash. But this fact irritates Ruldu. It is clear from this act of Ghana's son that land is an important factor in a capitalist society and all kind of tactics are used by people for enlarging their landholdings. When Moddan learns about it he is worried. "His feeling was that this would spark off yet another altercation and then-then who knows what it would all lead to?"(84) But Ruldu says,

...come to think of it, we're born only once in this world-just as we die once-so why should a man die a thousand times before his death...If you don't stop them now, tomorrow they'll pull down the wall of your house. You know when the camel is hungry, it's always better to pull the muzzle up, unless, of course, you want him to bite your leg. (85)

Capitalistic contexts and humanitarian concerns are, thus, at par with each other. It is impossible to combine them in the contemporary society. Ruldu is ready to die for his friend. He goes to Moddan's land and resolves the boundaries of landholdings. When Ghana's sons do not interfere, Ruldu feels disappointed but Moddan is happy due to the peaceful disposal of the issue. This situation sees Moddan's change of approach since his earlier days. However, it is not the last of disasters for Moddan.

Moddan also thinks of dwelling in his house. He wishes to live rest of his life happily. When Ruldu comes to know Moddan's desire for family, he starts searching for a spouse for Moddan and asks his mother, "Chachi now you can relax...and spend the rest of your life sitting on the cot. And if I don't make it possible, don't ever call me Ruldu again!" (87)... Moddan's desire to set up home was growing sharper by the day. He had not felt such a longing for a wife before- neither during his earlier days in the village nor while in jail... that it had driven him to have a glimpse of his former fiancée, who by now had become a mother of three...he had even heard the roar of the devil deep inside, wide awake, thirsting for blood. Somehow He had managed to tame the mad elephant by shackling his feet to pious thoughts. This entire episode was a secret he didn't want to share with anyone, even himself (89).

Moddan's dichotomy is that he murdered for saving himself from social humiliation and spends his youth in prison at the cost of not marrying his fiancée. The murder committed by him for getting rid of social humiliation does not absolve him from the adversities of his life as his past actions become an obstacle in the way of his acquiring a spouse and a family.

Gurdial Singh presents the predicament of unwanted children born out of previous union of a spouse through the incident of Daani. According to the values prevailing in labour class, the wife purchased out of money can be acceptable but not her children. Moddan unwillingly goes against this custom but the people of the village do not appreciate this step, "...this bit about protecting someone else's seed was a little hard...it would be extremely humiliating for any Jat to do so (97).

However, he did not have any option. Daani settles at Moddan's home. Her son from last marriage is the cause of annoyance for Moddan's mother. However, Daani's humility and kind approach result in a happy domestic life of Moddan. But he is worried about people's baseless allegations that, "...the Moddan and Ruldu had jointly bought a woman" (108). The main reason of this rumour is that, Ruldu had mortgaged his land for investing in a wife for Moddan. When Ruldu's decision of mortgaging land is objected to by Moddan, he replies, "And what about the one we've mortgaged already? You mean to say that it belongs to a third person? ... my dear fellow why do you have to talk like this? ...This is hurtful... O innocent one, what is it that binds one man to another? He alone is your relative who walks in step with you (90). Ruldu assures Moddan that he need not feel burdened because of his kindness.

One day Ruldu informs Moddan that the youngest one and Sajjan are going to separate from each other. Sajjan is going to enter into partnership with the sons of Ghana. He has decided to jointly invest in new *tubewell* and tractor. Moddan is not aware of all this. He realizes that he has no say in such decisions. He is dead to his brothers. Since the arrival of Daani in his home, he has become self-centered. He had no concern with anyone else except his land farm, home and his friendship with Ruldu. He asks himself a question, 'whether the living persons can be cornered in this way for rest of their life'. He realizes that such adverse phases have been derived by him in inheritance. Ruldu while accepting reality of the circumstances says, "You are wise enough yourself, you know it's not always important to guard the honour of the ancestors" (113). Lost in such torturous

thoughts Moddan felt that his situation was almost like that of a corpse, and whatever he did he would never be able to convince himself that he was still alive (114).

Due to lack of awareness, Moddan feels that Ruldu is building castles in the air when he speaks of the collective public struggle. Sometimes Moddan also feels influenced by Ruldu's approach and starts thinking like him. Ruldu and Moddan harvest their summer crop jointly. The people of the village comment: "...Such are the miracles you'll witness in the Kaliyuga of the Dark Age...isn't it strange that the real brothers don't see eye to eye, and that strangers are the best friends... (118). But Ruldu clarifies "These wretched fellows just can't tolerate the sight of two persons with their heads together. No Jat worth his salt can tolerate his kinsmen prospering and eating well- Never!" (122)

Moddan gets angry when he comes to know about all these facts about Sajjan. Moddan's youngest brother requests him that he should intervene and get him separated from Sajjan. He meant that after separation, Sajjan will have responsibility on his shoulders and probably improve himself. However, Moddan is not interested in this dispute. He advises the youngest one *Chhota* to resolve the dispute by himself because Moddan's involvement may spoil the matter. *Chhota* talks directly with Sajjan and urges him to resolve the matter of division of land. In the proceedings of Panchyat, Sajjan's mischief of registering three *ghumas* of land from joint income is also revealed. The newly constructed part of the house is kept by Sajjan for himself. *Chhota* gets annoyed at this but he wants to see the matter settled. Sajjan lets *Chhota* have that piece of land which uses water from Ghana's tubewell and passage through Ghana's field.

Moddan is unhappy about *Chhota*'s yielding before Ghana's sons and asks him to protest: "O my gentle soul, you mean to say that if tomorrow they tell our wives and children not to step out of our houses, we'll take it lying down? ... how downright demeaning for a Jat's son to show such cowardice. This won't help, I tell you" (127). But *Chhota* is not ready to face these circumstances. Kishan Singh considers him a "useless fellow". The relationship of *Chhota* and Moddan is a cause of trouble for Sajjan and Ghana's family; the people of the village misinterpret this fact and think that Daani is responsible for all this. "The gossip-mills had to turn, once again...this "miracle" was the "handiwork" of none other than Moddan's silent wife... First, to ensure disharmony between Chottu and

Sajjan and secondly, she was waiting for an opportunity when she could possess Chottu completely (128).

In this way, Gurdial Singh has presented the status of women in Punjabi society. It has been pointed out that the woman is considered an object which can be purchased and she is deemed the root cause of disputes in Punjabi culture. She does not enjoy her due status in the society. Daani is a sincere person who gets restless whenever her family faces a crisis. She says to Moddan, "Sometimes my foolish fears get the better of me" (131). Then Moddan asks Ruldu to convey a message to his in-laws to take her with them for an outing. She would feel better while going out with them for a while. He further says that it would be fine if they help us to get the child delivered with them. But Ruldu warns Moddan against this idea, "If they were in a position to arrange for the delivery they could very well have fed her too. You perhaps don't know that her Chacha is her own mother's husband, sala bastard... I simply refuse to trust them" (132).

The novelist has very effectively described the existence and importance of woman in the life of a man. After the death of Ruldu's wife, he feels "...it appeared to be a habitat of ghosts, not human beings...what is a house without a wife?... you can't catch hold of someone else's wife and being her house."(54)

Nobody pays respect to Moddan throughout his life. His soul has been aspiring for respect and honour for a long time. When Daani's brother Varyama addresses him as 'SardarJi' and talks politely with him, he feels satisfied. Despite the warning of Ruldu, he is in a dilemma about sending Daani back to her home and cannot refuse Varyama to take her back. Here the novelist has explains the dilemma of a woman when she cannot disparage her parents' family in front of her husband despite knowing their limitations. She does not want to move to her parental family and does not even want to disclose anything to Moddan about them. When she leaves Ruldu is not in the village. On the fourth day, he returns and learns about her exodus and says, "You shouldn't have done this... but let me tell you this wasn't a very wise thing to do...you shouldn't have driven Laxmi out of the house on such an auspicious day!" (133) because Daani had left his home on Dussehra day.

When Ruldu comes to know of this incident, he gets provoked. He feels annoyed at Moddan for committing yet another mistake and decides to go out for few days. But since he has to be there for the sowing of the next crop, he is unable

to move out. One day, a letter is received from Daani's parental house: "Daani's sister-in-law is all right now, but Daani will return after the delivery. Everything is well" (135).

Moddan felt isolated in the absence of Daani. He misses his step son Gellu. One day, *Chhota* comes to discuss the problem of harassment he faced at the hands of Ghana's sons. After serving the sentence, Moddan has been living his life peacefully but he takes this incident as a challenge. After hearing the details from *Chhota*, Moddan gets angry and abuses Ghana's family. *Chhota* attempts to control Moddan meanwhile *Ruldu* also reaches at the site and says, "This is very bad thing to have happened... And we can't remain silent about it- the camel that bites must be muzzled"(136). Through this conversation, the novelist once again highlights the false notion of honour in Punjabi culture.

One night Moddan and *Ruldu* sat for drinking session at *Ruldu's* house. Both were talking loudly. Next day, Moddan feels uncomfortable in the field and cannot operate the cart and bulls. In the evening, he takes another bottle of *Desi* wine. Under the effect of liquor, he starts walking towards Ghana's house. *Ruldu* follows him for a short distance but goes back after a while. He reaches Ghana *Numbardar's* residence and challenges them, "... come on why don't you send your 'brave' ones out to fight with me... why don't you come and shake hands with Ghana's 'son-in-law'?" (141). Kishan Singh says in *Gurdial Singh di Novel Chetna*,

It was time for Sajjan to prove his friendship and loyalty towards *Sakteiyan*. He attacks and wounds his own brother. And thus proves his loyalty towards *Sakteiyan*. (144)

Ruldu attacks *Sajjan* with a pickaxe and he falls down. *Ruldu* makes another blow and warns, "O you sinners! Why are you hell-bent upon destroying the entire family...?" (142) *Sajjan* runs and enters Ghana's house and shout from inside, "Oye, this bloody enemy of ours...he has ruined our entire family...! Ruined us completely!...O you Moddana! ...I'm going to gobble you up alive...!"(142)

The basis of the tragedy of this novel is not only the opposition arising out of class and caste system prevailing in the society but also the dissolution of the unit of family due to capitalist social and moral values. The feudalistic moral values cannot sustain themselves in the new set up and forge a disaster. Moddan does not have any aspiration as a representative of capitalist class for private property. He has more concern about his personal notion of honour, self-respect and

prestige (Vinod 122). The character of 'Sajjan' has been used by Gurdial Singh as a representative of the corrupting influence of the capitalist system. The novelist has attempted to present the defeat of social and moral values in the context of capitalist society by pointing out that every attempt is made to strengthen the economic situation even at the cost of social and moral values.

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CHAPTER 4

Comparative Analysis and Conclusion

A close analysis of Gurdial Singh's novel *Night of the Half Moon* and Ajmer Singh Aulakh's play *Sat Begane* shows an obvious similarity between the two texts. As analysed in the preceding chapters, both the authors portray socio-cultural issues in their work within the framework of realism. Apparently, Aulakh and Gurdial Singh differ in certain significant ways because of their different cultural locations and individual ideological orientations and assumptions.

Both Gurdial Singh and Ajmer Singh Aulakh deal with major social and cultural problems of the Punjabi society in a realistic manner which has remained the dominant mode of literary representations in contemporary Punjabi fiction. Literature written in realistic mode aims at a reflection of the society and its culture; though textual representation is not a mirror-like reflection but a 'constructed' and 'individualised' reflection. Socio-cultural issues always remain an important subject matter for literature and realistic writing.

Agriculture is the basic occupation of Punjabis. As farming is directly dependent on the fertile land, availability of water and man-power, possession of good fertile land at any cost has always remained a top-priority for all agrarian societies. But land is limited and with ever-increasing population, land-holdings are always on the decline.

After Independence, several changes occurred at political and societal level in Punjab which had a great impact on the society. Since 1965 there had been many changes in the techniques of the farming due to the Green Revolution. At that time, with the use of modern techniques, new fertilizers and pesticides, there was rapid increase in production, resulting in prosperity of a large section of farming community and the overall development of Punjab. Farmers of rich class of Punjab had major advantage in Green Revolution because they had the resources to put into agriculture.

However, this type of farming was expensive and required a lot of investment to give good returns. So the small and marginal farmers, being poor and having very small land holdings, fell in the web of debts as they had no money to buy these modern implements, they had to take loans from the government or other sources including private money-lenders. Once the farmers took loans, they

fell into the debt-trap and spent most of their lives in returning the loan and interest because they were often unable to earn extra money.

Commercialization of agriculture under the Green Revolution changed the socio-cultural environment of Punjab considerably, and these changes get reflected in the vernacular literature also. Playwright Ajmer Singh Aulakh belongs to agriculture driven Malwa region of Punjab, and his main themes are concerned with the depiction of village life with all its happiness, sorrows, miseries, hopes and disappointments. Problems of land and decreasing size of holdings get special focus in Aulakh's plays: how they live, how they earn by farming, and what are the main problems they are facing.

Ajmer Singh Aulakh, in his creative world, projects a realistic picture of the farming class. His real contribution lies in his portrayal of plights and problems, yearnings and aspirations, dreams and disillusionment of the farmers. Life of a Punjabi farmer occupies central stage in his plays. In his works, there is an authentic description of the problems of the farmers. He is recognised as the writer of the lives of landless or small farmers of Malwa region of Punjab. *Sat Begane* is one of his famous plays. In this play he presents the problems of Punjabi rural society, especially concentrating on the life and problems of women.

As pointed out in the Introduction, Gurdial Singh is one of the most prominent and significant novelists in Punjabi literature. The miserable condition of farmers and farm labourers are the important themes of his novels. He portrays the lives and problems of marginal and small Jat farmers of Punjab.

His narrative *The Night of the Half Moon* is located in the nineteen fifties and sixties of the twentieth century. In this novel, Gurdial Singh depicts the socio-cultural problems of Punjabi society. It brings out in a significant manner the rural cultural ethos of the Malwa area of Punjab. It establishes an altogether different identity of the Punjabi fiction, assigning it the features of both a regional novel and a pastoral parable. Though the novel is a story about an individual but it ends up becoming a sensitive portrayal of a society undergoing a process of complex social-economic transformation.

Night of the Half Moon is a tragic tale of an innocent, self-respecting and courageous *Malwai* Jat-Sikh's struggle and suffering as he tries to protect the family honour in his simple individual manner, and challenges the mechanizations of greedy, malicious and manipulative relatives. Darshan Singh Maini points in the

introduction to *Night of the Half Moon* that the three basic issues dealt with by the author are “land, woman and honour.” His fiction focuses on the condition of farmers of Punjabi society after 1970s. This novel explores the structure of Punjabi society especially focusing on the economic condition of rural area of Punjab with special focus on the social–economic condition of small farmers, feeling of revenge, significance of honour, condition of women, sexual relationship, value of land and the feeling of friendship and enmity in the Punjabi Society.

In the major work of both the writers, farmers occupy an important place. The primary concern of both writers is to portray the importance of cultural values in the Punjabi society. A number of common thematic concerns have been identified in both the novel and the play studied here.

The first and foremost theme of both texts is the importance of “land” because agriculture is the main occupation of Punjab and it occupies a significant place in Punjabi society. The life of Punjabi people is primarily based on agriculture and their economic condition is also dependent on the land. With increasing population, land holdings are decreasing because of its division among family members. This gives rise to various conflicts because people fight for fertile land. In the novel *Night of the Half Moon*, Panchyat divides the hereditary land of Moddan’s family and his brother Sajjan cleverly takes hold of fertile land.

Problems of farming had a great impact on the various institutions of society. The institution of “marriage” is also affected by the issue of land holdings. As the family possessions also play a great role in this institution because people desire to marry their daughters in economically well-off families. So, sometimes, the people, who do not have good economic status, remain unmarried. In the play *Sat Begane* similar situation is found because Nahari and his brothers do not get married because they do not have enough land.

“Pride” plays a significant place in the Punjabi society especially in the Jat community. Both the writers depict the importance of honour through the character of Moddan and Nahari. After the study of *Sat Begane* and *Night of the Half Moon* one can say that every Punjabi primarily wants to live with respect and integrity. In the *Night of the Half Moon* Moddan takes the revenge for the murder of his father Pala Singh because he does not want to lose the dignity and self-respect in his village as well as in the society. Ajmer Singh Aulakh has portrayed in his play *Sat Begane* that due to the feelings of pride and respect, Nahari murders his uncle,

because his uncle Bhanga had married a girl, who was fiancée of Nahari. So he felt insulted and took his revenge by murdering his uncle.

Aulakh and Gurdial Singh have portrayed their protagonists differently in their works. Moddan and Nahari fight for “pride” in dissimilar ways. Their pride differs because Moddan struggles for family pride while Nahari fights for his individual dignity. Moddan does not occupy the place of “hero” in the novel as his character and his deeds are not associated with heroic qualities by Gurdial Singh; while on the other hand Nahari is presented as a hero from beginning till the end of the play. The disaster for Moddan is that he murdered Ghana for restoring prestige of his family but his own family nearly abandons him and the label of ‘murderer’ causes him great adversities in his life.

Although people fight for the pride to get respect in the society but they never get that respect from the same society for which they sacrifice their lives like Moddan who suffers for the family honour, but does not get respect from his own family.

Both writers give same reason for the economic deterioration of farmers in the Punjabi society. As Nahari and Moddan have committed murders and have gone to jail, their families also come under more financial burden, due to already prevalent of land.

The condition of some of the women is very miserable in Punjabi society, because of the feudal mindset and male dominated patriarchal society. But Gurdial Singh and Aulakh appear to suggest that by suppressing a woman physically, no one can suppress her emotions, her feelings or her soul. Sometimes some women choose to surrender physically to needs of their unmarried relatives so as to prevent them from getting married, so that the family remains small and together, and the further fragmentation of land is avoided and their economic conditions improve. This thing is shown in the play by the character of Jaikur who has illicit relations with her brother-in-law Bhanga. She discloses this when he demands his own part of land.

Ajmer Singh Aulakh and Gurdial Singh’s texts portray the importance of woman in the life of man. Lakadchab in *Sat Begane* says to Karma that life without a woman looks as if it is haunted by ghosts. Similarly in *Night of the Half Moon*, after the death of Ruldu’s wife, he feels that his life has become unreal and

ghostly, not fit for human beings and his home became deserted without a wife. Thus, both works demonstrate the significant role of women in men's life.

On comparing the women characters in the both texts, it can be said that female characters in the novel are mainly subservient to the males and have orthodox mindset. In the *Night of the Half Moon*, Gurdial Singh portrays these things through the character of Daani, who is exploited by his brother like a puppet. She has no choice and is marginalised by dominant male society. On the other hand, characters in the play *Sat Begane* like Mindho and Jaikur assert their own identity by voicing their ideas and opinions to combat a predominantly male dominated society. Result of this suppression is that they show their identity by revolting against the patriarchal society. Jaikur marries a man named Bachna, who belongs to another caste. She dares to do so against the wishes of her parents.

Another major problem which woman faces in this play is the problem of sexual relations with her husband. This problem emerges when she does not get husband of her own choice, and of her own age. Her dreams and aspirations are shattered and their lives are marked by dissatisfaction. All these things have been illustrated by Aulakh through the character of Mindho, who marries Gogha but fulfils her sexual aspirations by having extramarital affair with Nahari.

Casteism has a great influence in Punjabi society. Most people are forced to follow its norms. Inter-caste marriages are based on economic, social and political status. Aulakh has vividly depicted this issue of caste and inter-caste marriage in his play *Sat Begane* through the characters of Bachna and Jaikur. They and their children have to face a lot of problems throughout their lives because Bachna belongs to Jat community, but Jaikur is of lower caste. In their moment of passion, they neglect the traditional values of the society and get married. Aulakh illustrates the inner biases of Punjabi society in which Jat community does not accept Jaikur, because she belongs to the so called lower caste.

Both writers use simple language that can be easily be comprehended by readers. Both writers use the *Malwai* dialect of the Punjabi in their texts because of the influence of their surroundings, as both writers belong to Malwa region of Punjab. The titles of the novel and the play have symbolic significance.

The novelist and the dramatist use realistic modes of representation in their works in different and unique ways. Their characters and events are located in a

specific socio-cultural context. Aulakh and Gurdial Singh write from experience. They present their stories through the eyes of characters who represent the emotions, desires and deep thoughts of real people opening the way for readers to understand and immerse in the characters' lives.

The present study has attempted a comparative analysis between a play and a novel because the thematic concerns of Ajmer Singh Aulakh and Gurdial Singh are similar, in spite of the different genres. These writers examine critically the cultural values that affect common man's life. Their characters represent the reality of life by depicting living style and cultural values of the villages.

Socio-economic situation of Punjab is a very complex one as a lot of internal and external factors are involved in it. This study was an introductory attempt to understand representation of socio-cultural concerns in different forms of literature. It tried to understand the representation and transformation of real life issues into fictional narratives. More studies are required to fully comprehend the issues and dilemmas of Punjabi society, which is transforming at a rapid pace.

In conclusion, it can be said that Gurdial Singh and Ajmer Singh Aulakh are two most prominent contemporary Punjabi writers who perceptively and analytically present the harsh realities of rural society of Malwa region of Punjab. They not only capture the social and cultural realities of the lives of men and women, they portray the broader historical and economic transformations taking place around them. In this sense, they are very reliable chroniclers of Punjabi society. Their typical idiom and perceptive presentations of rituals and ordinary routines of lives of ordinary people make them most significant contemporary Punjabi writers.

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