

Research Article

Narrative Space and Spatial Reading of Gurdial Singh's Select Novels

Vivek Sachdeva

Professor in English, University School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Guru Govind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi
Email: viveksachdeva09@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Gurdial Singh is an important literary voice in Punjabi literature. He is accredited with bringing the voice of the marginalized and oppressed communities of Punjab to the forefront. In his novels, he has given an account of social injustice, casteism, deprivation and struggle of the poor. He exhibits his profound understanding of deeply embedded caste/class structure in the society of Punjab. Set in Malwa region, a backward region of Punjab, his novels portray an authentic picture of the society with focus on its dialect, sociological and historical backdrop. While telling the plight of the low caste and working class, he has described the everyday way of life of the people, their houses, landscape of Malwa, and open fields seen through his critical eye. It is imperative to understand space(s) in his complex and multilayered novels. In the present paper, the attempt is to study spaces in Gurdial Singh's novels using spatialization of narratives as a technique to interpret novels.

Keywords: Malwa, Narrative Space, Novels, Spatial reading

Since Kant, Time and Space have been two parameters of structuring and understanding human experience. Time and space have occupied an important place in the study of narratives too. One way of structuring human experience is telling stories. Narrative structure does not merely give a form to an amorphous mass of events; it also structures human experience and puts events in a perspective. In classical narratology, emphasis has been on temporal and spatial arrangement of events in a narrative. Post-narratology, ever since the emergence of deconstruction and post-modernism on the theory scene, aims at combining

structuralist reading of narrative with cultural, philosophical and historical issues. Contextualist narratology¹ relates narratives to specific cultural, historical and ideological contexts, which has made looking at space in narratives with a new perspective possible. Thus, since post-narratology the study of narrative is not merely a matter of arrangement of events in time and space. Fludernik and Gibson have argued against structuralist apparatus of narratology and opened avenues for reading issues of history, culture and society while studying narratives.

In classical narratology, narrative has been understood at the level of ‘what is said’ and ‘how it is said’ with more emphasis on arrangement of events, order, frequency and certain aspects of narration. Spatial approach, on the contrary, becomes an interpretive strategy to explore another space in narratology which takes the study of narrative beyond its formalistic aspects. This another space of narratology is not the fixed alternative to formalistic narratology or the third angle in the scheme of form and content, rather it opens up the possibilities of studying fluid relation between text and context. Kristeva and Chatman have contributed majorly to study other spaces of narrative study. Their theoretical ideas to study narrative have given a new impetus by philosophers and thinkers like Edward Soja. The spatial approach opens up the text to multiple meanings and interpretations. Empowering the reader to explore the vertical axis and explore social, cultural and historical dimensions of a narrative, it results into a scheme of thoughts in which no text is static and fixed; every text is, rather, dynamics and in a state of becoming with every act of reading. Narratology originally started as a discipline to studying formalistic-structuralist aspects of narrative. During its evolution, widening its epistemic reach, the discipline interacts with other domains of knowledge which makes spatial study of narratives a possibility. There are still more possibilities to explore fluid connections between narrative text and context, and to study the social, the cultural and the historical while performing the study of the narrative. Narrative becomes the site where all these forces meet, interact and intersect making the narrative space ever becoming and dynamic. Thus spatial study of literary narratives is political while being apolitical and apolitical while being political. Spatialization of narrative is important as it “provides a fluid, relational approach that connects text and context” (Friedman 19).

The Spatial Turn in the study of History, Literature and Culture has put ‘space’ at the forefront. Foregrounding Space does not mean that Time is thrown out of the critical purview. It has simply changed the equation between time and space. The Spatial Turn brings to the forefront what was already there, but was ignored. In spatial readings of narratives, space becomes the primary axis to understand human experience and time becomes the secondary. However, Mieke Bal’s distinction between place and space defines space in relation to time. One location or place

¹For details, read Seymour Chatman

when seen through the axis of time acquires different spatial dimensions. In simple words, Punjab before the colonial period is one spatial entity and Punjab during the colonial period becomes another spatial entity. Philosophically speaking, Time and Space cannot be separated; but the equation between them has altered in past fifty years or so. Inseparability of Time and Space has been theorized by Bakhtin in chronotope, Werth in 'text world', Herman in 'storyworld' and Genette in 'diegesis'.

In Bakhtin's concept of chronotope, time and space are inseparable and interconnected. In modernism, emphasis had been on the study of time, at the expense of space; and in postmodernism, there is an emphasis on space. While studying horizontal and vertical axes of narratives, spatial readings of narratives allow readers to explore patterns beyond the immediate narrative structures. Spatial reading of narrative eventually opens up text to the possibility of various readings, which also includes the space of gender, race, class and caste of the society. There are different ways to study spatial forms of narratives. One is what proposed by Joseph Frank. The theoretical concept of enhancing spatiality by breaking chronology of time imagines narratives as flat surface of which time and space are two axes on the horizontal plane. However, if narratives are complex and have more than two flat dimensions, the other dimensions or axis of narratives can be opened up during the process of spatial reading of narratives as "for Kristeva, spatialization constitutes text as a verbal surface or place in which both time and space, synchrony and diachrony, function as coordinates for textual activity" (Friedman 13). Every text is in a state of constant interactions with both the axes through free play of signs, which a reader opens during the process of critical reading. Within the scheme of Kristeva's understanding of spatialization, a critique of formalism from an ideological point of view, social and historical angles of the narrative are equally crucial to explore the vertical axis of narrative study. If narrative is a discourse, understanding of the vertical axis is vital to understand the discourse of a narrative. Discourse, in this case, is not merely understood in terms of 'how' or 'what'. It goes beyond the patterns to include the social, the historical and the cultural.

Since ancient times, spatial imagery has occupied an important position in human imagination. Different aspects of real or mythical life have been imagined spatially e.g. heaven is above, hell is below; future is ahead and past is behind; more is up and less is down. Spatial imagination is not exclusive to literature. It is central in cartography, painting, cinema and architecture too. Space in narrative is not just the world where action takes place, characters live and move. Space in narrative can be understood from the location where action takes place to the implied space, spatial frame, setting, story space and discourse space, which is different from the understanding of discourse space determined by materiality of the medium. Man in postmodern times has been imagined as a spatial being with active

participation in “social construction of embracing spatiality” (Soja 1) in which meaning and man’s relation with space is constantly produced and reproduced. Soja in his work has tried to give a new perspective to human spatial imagination exploring its social and historical dimensions. Founding the argument on the inseparability of the social, the historical and the spatial, in this paper the attempt is to hypothesize narrative space to see the social-historical-spatial triad in narratives, taking it beyond the formalistic analysis of narrative and the world of fictional space created in the work. Edward Soja propounding his idea on spaces, he started his philosophical inquiry from spatial thread and gradually included all other ideas within the fabric of his spatial perspective. Spatial reading gives us a ‘reading’ or ‘discourse’ of the space, not the ‘practical’ knowledge of space. Spatiality does not lie in finding or inventing the third centre while questioning the binary; it rather lies in opening up the possibilities of going beyond the existing binaries “to build further, to move on, to continuously expand the production of knowledge beyond what is known” (Soja 61).

The central question is how narrative space can be seen as a kind of space where questions of race, class, caste and gender can be addressed. Taking narratives as socially symbolic acts², can narrative space be imagined as a political thirdspace? The assumption is that narratives, like life-stories, are “as intrinsically and revealing spatial as they are temporal and social” (Soja 7). In this scheme, narrative becomes the space where the social, the historical and the ideological meet. The study of narrative, thus, goes beyond mere study of arrangement of events in time and space. Within the narrative space, one can explore the social, the historical and the ideological, which adds complexity to the narrative and also to the study of narratives. Through spatial reading, various spaces in narratives are also produced and reproduced. In such production of narrative space, the historical and the composition of social relations are also produced. Michael Deer’s long list of spaces, arranged alphabetically, ends with women’s space. In Indian context, the space of caste can also be added to the long list. If social space is decipherable in “thoughts and utterances, speech, writing, in literature and language, in discourses and texts” (Soja 63) and reality is a ‘thought thing’ understood through its representation, literary narratives are an important ‘space’ to understand the triad of the social, the historical and the spatial. Literary narratives can be seen as the Spaces of Representation and the Spatial Practice to understand the production of the social space. Using Soja’s terminology, the narrative space is not to be understood either as natural or mental. It is while understanding narrative space as real-and-imagined that the social space can be understood. Breaking down the walls that divide them, the physical, the mental and the social have to be seen simultaneously.

²The phrase has been borrowed from Fredric Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious*.

The trajectory of spatial reading of narratives, thus, begins from the geographical place where action takes place and gradually includes spaces of history, culture, ideology and aesthetics. The shift is from tangible to abstract, real to imagined, physical to mental. In the post-colonial Eastern Punjab (Indian), Malwa is the most backward region as compared to other two regions namely Majha and Doaba, which are known for fertile land and rich water resources. The region witnesses miserable conditions of poor farmers and the working class. Poor low caste people of Punjab have been worst hit by the Green Revolution of the 1960s as its benefits were reaped by the rich high caste farmers and the condition of the low caste people was made worse by the “decline of traditional social support system based on community support” (Gill 219). In the rural spaces of Punjab in general and Malwa in specific, peripheralization and marginalization of the low caste can be seen vividly. In these spaces, the play of power leading to subordination of the poor and the low caste is rampant. In a state with a strong presence of Sikhism, which does not theoretically believe in casteism, the *majhabis*, the *Ad Dharmis* and *Ravidasis* have been a victim of oppressive practices of the upper caste.

Gurdial Singh, born in the family of low caste Ramgarhia community, occupies an important position in the literary historiography of Punjabi literature, largely dominated by the high caste Jat Sikh writers. Credit also goes to him for giving a nuanced sociological perspective on Malwa region of Punjab in his novels. In his writings, Malwa region of Punjab, seen from the point of view of the low caste and marginalized, comes alive. Before Gurdial Singh, there was hardly a Punjabi writer who expressed the issues of the low caste from their point of view. Gurdial Singh's writing practice and narrative space offers a counter hegemonic cultural practice and space- wherein he gave voice to the marginalized and oppressed of Punjab. Without making his novels overtly political, he gave resistance to the oppressive boundaries set primarily on the basis of caste and gender in Punjab.

Gurdial Singh was born at Bhaini Fateh, a village near Jaitu in District Fardikot, in the Malwa region of Punjab in the family of Ramgarhiyas, a low caste community in Punjab. His father would make cart-wheels in winters and trunks in summers. Shaped by tough economic conditions, water scarcity and the plight of the low caste, Gurdial Singh started his literary career with the publication of a short story in a literary magazine. He went on to publish around 9 novels, childrens' literature, short stories, drama and autobiography. *Marhi Da Deeva* published in 1964 is his first novel which established him as a writer. Later, he also wrote novels such as *Unhoye*, *Adh Chanani Raat*, *Rete Di Ik Muthi*, *Anne Gode Da Daan* and *Parsa*.

Like Thomas Hardy in English literature, in Gurdial Singh Punjabi literature found its regional novelist. He has set his novels in the Malwa region of Punjab changing under the impact of industrialization and Green Revolution. While catching the “distinctive flavor of the regional dialect and its linguistic angularities” (Nayar

233), Gurdial Singh has shown different hues of the human self and man's struggle against odds as experienced by the low caste and the marginalized in Malwa region of Punjab. In the social and literary space of Punjab, the dominance of the high caste Jat Sikh is highly pronounced. Gurdial Singh's position in Jat Sikh dominated Punjab cannot be defined in simple binaries. Compared with the high caste Jat Sikhs, he belongs to the lower caste of Ramgariyas; and when compared with the dalit of Punjab, he seems to more privileged than them. He is an insider, yet outsider and an outsider while being an insider. He has seen suffering of the low caste and other communities in the world around him, even if his own lived experience is different from that of a dalit in Punjab. He looked at Punjab both from "the outside in and from the inside out" (Soja 100). He may or may not be a subaltern, as opined by Rana Nayar, he has certainly spoken for the subaltern in Punjab. He has "spoken for himself as well as others less privileged than him... It is a voice that speaks of the subalterns in a way they would have, perhaps, liked to be spoken of, a voice that gives them a sense of selfhood, an agency, an identity..." (Nayar 25)

Gurdial Singh in his novels has written what he saw and experienced in his life. In his lived experience, he has witnessed the hardships, struggle and sufferings of the low caste in Punjab. The marginalized low caste people have been given centrality in his narratives. It is from their vantage point that Gurdial Singh tells the story of Punjab. In his tragic view of life, characters are victims, not of conspiracy by gods or a tragic flaw in their personalities, but of the social and economic structure they are a part of. Their tragedies are triggered off by the oppressive structures. Their fall may not result into the fall of the nation, but their fall is certainly a strong signifier of the fall of the nation. In his novels, one finds sharp critique of social and economic system of Punjab, which has always favoured the upper caste. Gurdial Singh's *raison d'être* of writing is also expressed through the rhetorical question of Tindi, a low caste man, in *Parsa*, who asks the most pertinent question. He asks his master to tell him a story and later asks a more important question—"Why are the stories always about kings and princes?" Gurdial Singh tells the story of the ordinary, or to be more precise he tells the stories of the less-than-ordinary. Gurdial Singh himself may not be a dalit in its purest sense; but in a state dominated by high caste Jat Sikhs, the status of a Ramgarhia Sikh has always been lower than the Jat Sikh. In his novels he has given centrality to those who were on the margins in the society and he has given voice to those who were otherwise silenced by the social structure.

Marhi Da Deeva, Gurdial Singh's first novel, tells the story of economic and social outcast. The narrative raises the issue of land ownership and changing relationship in the context of Green Revolution. In one narrative, Gurdial Singh weaves the issues of caste and social class in the drama of Jagseer, the protagonist of the novel. Jagseer is a victim of his circumstances. Jagseer's is the story of

unrequited love, social and economic failure, suffering and finally, dying of opium addiction. In the tragic story of a failed man is embedded the tragedy of the low caste, who owing to the social and economic structure find no scope of redemption in their lives. Jagseer's fate is determined by two important factors, which are beyond his control. His father, Thola, married Nandi, who belonged to the clan of Sansi caste. She was excommunicated from her clan for marrying someone outside the clan against the wishes of her elders. His mother's caste identity gives Jagseer a mixed caste identity. Thola was working as share-cropper with Dharam Singh, whose father had given Thola a small piece of land to work on. Due to bureaucratic hurdles, the land could not be transferred to Thola's name. However, he continued to work on that land. Jagseer inherited mixed caste identity and lack of ownership of land from his parents. When the novel opens, Jagseer's mother is asking Sooti to find a suitable match for her forty-two year old son. Sooti ignores Nandi's request and subtly ridicules Jagseer for his age and their poverty.

Jagseer was once a good looking young man with a fine physique. His friends used to feel jealous of Jagseer. When Nikka got married, Jagseer, along with his friends, goes to meet Nikka and his wife. Nikka's wife, Bhani, feels attracted towards Jagseer. Their mutual attraction becomes a cause of conflict between Nikka and Bhani which ends up into physical violence against Bhani. Bhani is taken back by her brothers. They agree to send her back only when Nikka promises them not to beat her again. When Bhani comes back to the village, her love for Jagseer is rekindled. But Jagseer, compelled and circumscribed by social moral codes, his own status and shy nature, refuses to take this attraction to the next level. However, his feelings for Bhani never die. The novel also portrays how modern economic and social structure of Punjab is leading to depletion of traditional values and notions. His novels have shown society of Punjab caught between tradition and modernity. Dharam Singh's son namely Bhanta turns hostile towards Jagseer. He perceives Jagseer as his rival, who would usurp the land without any legal ownership. Dharam Singh has always considered Jagseer and his father as members of his family. But with Bhanta, the three-generation old emotional bond between two families is dying. Bhanta is more interested in selling the yield in the *mandi*. Bhanta, with the help of local money lender, also got the tree of *Tahli*, felled down. While falling, the tree destroyed *marhi*, a small memorial of Jagseer's father in the field. The shock is too strong for Jagseer's mother, who eventually dies. Gradually, Jagseer loses everything in life. He had lost his father long time back; he has lost his control of the land; he loses his mother and also could not attain his love. Broken and defeated from all fronts, he befriends Raunki and gets addicted to opium, which eats away Jagseer gradually. When Jagseer dies, Raunki builds a small *marhi* in the memory of Jagseer outside the village. To his surprise, he finds one day Bhani daubing the *marhi* in the last scene of the novel.

Unhoye is his second major novel. The novel portrays breaking down of social and personal relationships under the influence of industrialization and modernity. It is set in colonial Punjab. As the narrative progresses, it enters the post-colonial Punjab in which colonial practices are replaced by the neo-colonial ones. The novel revolves around two brothers, carpenters by profession, Bishna and Bhagta, and their confrontation with the corrupt colonial administrative institutions. Bishna, a man of courage and conviction, refuses to compromise on his dignity and chooses the path of confrontation. Through spatial segregation and description the novelist has highlighted the class difference. Set in a small township, areas of the rich and the poor are clearly separated. The houses of the rich are centrally located and that of the poor are of the margins of the township. Bishna takes an ideological stand by choosing to stay in a house on the periphery of the township. Unlike his previous novel, the protagonist in this novel refuses to yield before the circumstances. Gurdial Singh, in this novel, has shown resistance against corrupt and oppressive structures from the margins. The low caste protagonist, who like the novelist belongs to the community of carpenters, has an agency to fight for his dignity. Bishna's choice and actions in the novel transform the margins into radical spaces in the novel.

Malwa is just not a location in his novels. It is the space where Gurdial Singh has seen the drama of human life and struggle unfold itself in its different shades. To quote Rana Nayar:

Malwa comes alive in his novels both as a place in history and as a cultural metaphor. Its stubborn, unyielding land, sandy soil and prickly air, low-roofed mud houses and vast open fields, mingle and overlap with stifling caste prejudices and intriguing questions of land ownership/possession to create a befitting backdrop to this incomparable saga of human courage, resilience and sacrifice. (235).

Gurdial Singh exercises his ideology, vision of life and aesthetics through the portrayal of people of Malwa in his novels. Punjab in his novels is not an idyllic rural space, nor is it merely a space of family feuds over land ownership. His narratives explore the struggle of people of Malwa in the context of industrialization and modernity. The region of Malwa is known for its rich cultural heritage, folklore and legends. However, the rich heritage of Malwa stands eclipsed in economic and social backwardness of Singh's contemporary Punjab. He portrays struggle and strife of low caste people of Punjab in the changing sociological context. His characters are constantly struggling against their circumstances. The rough and prickly landscape of Malwa becomes the metaphor of the struggle and hardships the low caste people face in their lives. Malwa, thus, in his novel ceases to be a backdrop and becomes an equal participant like a character. Gurdial Singh is loyal

to the dialect of the region, description of houses, dresses, customs and folklore. His vast artistic vision includes from the cultural memory to immediate history. The narrative becomes the site where ideology, aesthetics, history and cultural memory meet. In the vertical axis can be found various strands, through the interaction of which the narrative space is produced and reproduced in his writings. Through his novels he brings the cultural, historical, ideological spaces within the fictional space of his novels.

Description of the locality of the low caste in the novel, their houses, food habits and living conditions is symbolic of their material and spiritual state. Space in Gurdial Singh's novels signifies the position of the low caste. Even spatial design of towns and villages becomes a potent metaphor to understand marginalization of the low caste. It is also the space where the hegemony of the upper caste can be seen exercised. To narrate the experience of those who are on the margin through spatial axis is not a new phenomenon. Bell Hooks has narrated, and theorized the experience of the black women through geographical location of the black colony and houses, in which she understands the margin as the space of radical difference. She articulated her black identity through houses and spaces. Gurdial Singh also tells us stories of the underprivileged and marginalized by giving us details of Malwa's "unyielding land, prickly air, low-roofed mud houses, and vast open fields mingle and overlap with stifling caste prejudices and intriguing questions of land ownership to create a befitting backdrop to this incomparable saga of human courage, resilience and sacrifice" (Nayar 232). Gurdial Singh had been radical by making the low caste protagonists of his novels; still he does not write like a propagandist. In the self-proclaimed aesthetics of 'critical realism', his ideology has never dominated his art. The resilience and will to struggle and suffer in characters challenges the hegemonic position of the upper caste Jat Sikh. Even while giving voice to the voiceless in Punjab or while making the subaltern speak in his narratives, Gurdial Singh does not lose his compassionate touch with the human life. He tells stories like an engaging story teller without making his readers conscious of the ideology he cherishes. His characters meet tragic end like Jagseer in *Marhi Da Deeva* and sometimes, they resist like Bishna in *Unhoye* or like Parsa in the eponymous novel, they meet all challenges of life like a karam-yogi.

The space (rural and fictional) in his novels is not a static, but dynamic. Gurdial Singh explores the changing contours of the rural space of Malwa in the context of modernity which is affecting human relationships too. In his novels, in the words of Lefebvre, the production of space is shaped by the forces of power at work. Gurdial Singh also explores various shades of his art and ideology through his novels by telling stories about everyday experiences of the people. Through the narrative space Gurdial Singh expresses his philosophy of life and tragic vision.

Life, to Gurdial Singh, is an incessant struggle against forces that a man can see and also against those which are beyond man's reach. Gurdial Singh as a writer believed that his novels were inspired by his day to day lived experience. Writing, for this son of a carpenter, was not an elitist activity and the result of heightened state of being. It rather emerged from his encounter and negotiations with the everyday reality of Punjab in his times. In his writing, thus, he has given an account of the struggle and resilient resistance of the low caste and other marginalized sections of Punjabi society. The low caste people in Punjab, and especially in Malwa region of Punjab are subject to domination of and exploitation by the upper caste and economically stronger sections of the society. Gurdial Singh was aware of the challenges before the low caste/class communities in Punjab. He has narrated experiences of the marginalized and oppressed in his novels. His novels are set in rural Malwa, but they also explore human consciousness determined by socio-economic structures. His novels are primarily 'narratives of culture' while also being 'narratives of character'. In his artistic view, human self is the result of social, cultural and historical milieu one belongs to. His narratives explore the social, cultural and historical spaces while telling tales of the ordinary people of Malwa. In his novels, the social, the cultural and the historical meet with the aesthetic. The interaction among different streams in his narratives makes his narrative a dynamic space.

Looking at aesthetics of Gurdial Singh, it can be said that he chose to be radical from the margins; but he did speak from the margins and he spoke for the margins. His enunciations are strongly located in his position and in his lived experiences. In his aesthetics of 'critical realism', a subtle political use of space can be seen. Without letting his ideology appear on the surface, he gave centrality to the low caste, poor farmers and the working class of Punjab in his novels. The space he has shown in his novels is the socially and economically rural space of Malwa. He has captured the dynamics of change in the context of modernity making in-roads in Punjab. He strongly portrays the changing space in the backdrop of the advent of modernity and its impact on the social life in Punjab. Human values are changing; relationships are affected and characters are going out of the traditional circumscribed space in search of new avenues. Spaces of human action are being re-drawn. In *Marhi Da Deeva*, depletion in moral values can be seen through the character of Bhanta. The amount of emphasis of selling the crop in the market signifies how new modes of trade are changing the old fabric of the society. The values exemplified by Dharam Singh and his father have become outdated. Realizing the change, Dharam Singh suddenly disappears one day. In *Rete Di Ik Mutthhi*, the protagonist goes to the city while chasing his materialist dreams. Ironically, his great expectations of making a fortune for himself meet with infidelity of his wife, who was left alone back home, and his ending up becoming a commercial

painter painting hoardings. Finally, he decides to end his chase by refusing to go abroad. In *Anne Ghode Da Daan*, the possibility of finding new source of income by working as rickshaw puller is being explored. The space he portrays in his novels and the space he gave to his characters in his narratives, both, acquire metaphorical dimensions. He begins from a tangible space as the setting of Malwa region in his novels is palpable. Gradually he explores its sociological, cultural and historical dimensions while exploring the consciousness of his characters rooted in the socio-economic reality of Malwa. In the dynamic space of his novels and also Malwa, there are constant tensions between individuals and their circumstances. His characters are victims of feudal social structure and incoming industrialization. The problems of the low caste and working class people of Punjab were re-defined in the context of changing socio-economic context. His characters no longer submit to their fate meekly. They also make their own choices even in the face of suffering. His narratives may not be giving the dream of revolution, but as a novelist, Gurdial Singh has also explored the possibility of resistance in his novels such as *Unhoye* and *Adhdh Chananai Raat*; simmering anger in the midst of frustrating circumstances in *Anne Ghode Da Daan*, journey to the city to chase materialist dreams to finally realize its futility in *Rete De Ik Mutthhi* and finally, in *Parsa*, he blends circumstances with the consciousness of the character. Resistance given by the low caste might have not resulted into concrete results, but the important point is that they are able to resist and also to keep the space of resistance alive. The agonal struggle of these survivors was not able to turn over the power structures, but they at least succeeded in identifying the power centres and resisting them. He has explored the space of negotiation, resistance and resilience from the point of view of the marginalized in his novels. In his writings can be found, what Bell Hooks says:

It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of marginality one wishes to lose, to give up, but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. (As cited by Soja).

It is crucial for the marginalized and the oppressed to understand margin as a location. The places of margin are also the spaces of injustice and oppression; they can also become the spaces of resistance and resilience. By representing the spaces of the margin in the society in his novels, Gurdial Singh has blended the social and the historical with the aesthetic. In this scheme of ideas, writing becomes an empowering activity for the author to assert his low caste identity in a cultural/literary space dominated by the Jat Sikhs, to claim his movement from margin towards the centre. The narrative space becomes the site of resilience and resistance offering a counter-hegemonic discourse.

REFERENCES

- Chatman Friedman SS, 1993. Spatialization: A Strategy for Reading Narrative. *Narrative*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 12-23.
- Gill SS, Economic Distress and Farmer Suicide in Rural Punjab. *JPS.*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 219-237.
- Nayar R, 2012. The Novel as a Site of Cultural Memory: Gurdial Singh's *Parsa*. *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 233-254.
- Nayar R, 2012. Gurdial Singh: A Storyteller Extraordinaire. *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1&2, pp. 229-246.
- Nayar R, 2012. Gurdial Singh, the Voice of the Voiceless. (http://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2017_52/2/CM_LII_1_14012017_Rana_Nayar.pdf).
- Smith MW, 1953. Social Structure in Punjab. *EPW*. Accessed at (http://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/1953_5/47/social_structure_in_the_punjab.pdf).
- Soja EW, 1996. *Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-Imagined Places*. USA and UK: Blackwell.