

**Comprehending Thematic Concerns and Artistic Styles with
Special Reference to Pash's Poetry**

by

Umindar Kaur Batish

Assistant Professor

Department of English,Cultural Studies and Foreign Languages

G. S.S.D.G.S Khalsa College Patiala.

Umin8830@gmail.com

Abstract

The objective of this research paper is to make the readers understand the thematic concerns and artistic styles of Pash's (Avtar Singh Sandhu) poetry. Every society has its rules and conventions which are somehow against the people of that society. Pash through his poetry tried to expose the ideological apparatuses existing in that era which according to him made the life of common people more miserable. This paper deals with the different aspects of Pash's poetry that how he became the voice of voiceless and destitute people by using the vocabulary like over-excited (*bhawantry hoï*), pool (*chhapar*), fingertips (*pote*) used by common people. Following Marxism he raised his voice against inequality and dedicated his life to his art moving ahead from the pre-established structures prevalent in that period to awake the sleeping conscience of the people. Adding to this he used various literary devices like imagery, satire, figurative expression and symbols in the form of metaphors to make his artistic style more effective so that he can attack on the evils of dominating ruling class of that period.

The objective of this paper is to comprehend the theory of Pash's poetry by reading his thematic concerns and artistic styles. This paper includes the various themes used in his poetry and also throws light on his attitude towards his coeval poetic rules. Refusing the poetic conventions of bourgeois, Pash's poetry reflects the different aspects of society or it can be considered as a social document. Thus the paper deals with the deep analysis of the various poetic forms and methods used by Pash in his poetry along with the explanation and originality of the theme.

It is only the poetry through which our emotions, expressions and thoughts that are the reflection of our life and society can be expressed. In this way, a poet presents the world's view that he sees from his experiences and beliefs. Pash was not barely a poet he was also a deep thinker, vigorous soldier of revolutionary movement. He originated multifaceted poetry with full of new ideas, motives and insights, thereby leaving behind the boundaries of contemporary conventions of nation and time. His poetry was an immediate reaction against any injustice, oppression and exploitation predominating in the society. His words become the voice of voiceless and destitute sphere of the society. He becomes an inspiration for common people to fight against the crooked socio-political and socioeconomic system. He dedicated his life to his poetry and also struggled hard against the bitter realities and situations of life.

Pash's ideas regarding the world come from deeply felt aphorism that is equality. He agitated people through his poetry to struggle against the system which he considered, was not meant for the benefit of the people. Pash's words acted as desirous seeds of revolution in spitting out open revolt. He actually proved that it is only "Pen" which is deadlier than all other weapons. He tried to bring drastic transformation in the contemporary socio-political and socioeconomic system as well as the contemporary poetic conventions with his Marxist ideology so as to give them disparate revolutionary hue. His poetry acted as a cactus full of thorns for the contemporary social, political, cultural and literary conventions. Attacking the bourgeois poetic aesthetics he says:

Don't expect that I the son of fields
Shall talk of your chewed and spat out tastes. (Pash 124)

Pash was deeply influenced by Marxism and it became the fountainhead of Pash's revolutionary spirit. According to Marxism a poet must dedicate his art towards a noble and revolutionary cause so that he could bring the change needed for common people; he must play the role of representative who represents his society. According to Marxism

Ideology not in the first place a set of doctrines, it signifies the way men line out of their roles in class society, the value of the ideas and images which tie them to their social function and so prevent them from a true knowledge of society as a whole.(Eagleton 15)

Pash justified the Marxist principle of social change through the body of literary works. He perfectly proved Terry Eagleton notion that a “writer translates social facts into literary ones . . .” (41). He demanded a new society purely based on equality. Marxism was the base of Pash's poetry. As Marxist philosophers, Pash took economical relations as the foundation of society. He was very well aware of the conditions of the common people. Philosophically according to Marx socio-political system is controlled by upper class or bourgeois. Bourgeois exploited the class of proletariat in every field who tolerated this exploitation till they didn't become aware of their rights. As soon as they became aware of their rights and exploitation they were tolerating, they moved towards the path of revolt. As Pash says:

We shall fight comrade, for the gloomy season

We shall fight, comrade, for the enslaved desires

We shall collect, comrade, the fragment of life. (Pash 84)

Poetry is an art of creativity not a political proclamation. It can be based on ideology rather than being fully philosophical. Pash's poetry was instilled with his ideology. He gave us the wisdom to see unjust principles of system of the state. He tried to expose the philosophy that binds an individual in a structure.

History of a human being is an arena of eternal struggle. A glimpse on this history makes it very clear that every authority or power seeks to endure its reign and also uses every measure to keep it lasting and secure. Explicitly it uses its ideological apparatus. After observing these ideological apparatuses Althusser made a list of Ideological State Apparatuses such as “education, family, legal system, trade union, communication, politics, culture, religion” (qtd. in Jorge Larrain 240). State has

another category of these kinds of apparatus; they are called 'Repressive State Apparatus'; because they function with violence. They include "administration, army, police, courts and jails etc" (Singh47). Pash slammed both the ISAs and RSAs in his poetry. RSAs like police and law are openly challenged by Pash:

Hey! the rulers
Ask your policemen and tell
Who is in prison?
I, who am behind these bars,
Or the constable there outside. (Pash 48)

He tried to drag down the ISAs like religion and educational institutions since they proliferate the ideology of class in power. Pash's poetry exposed the tyrants, aggressors and oppressors. He connected poetry with society by unveiling the society's cruel and brutal forces and used his words like arrows to challenge the contemporary dominant ideological discourse. With the turmoil which had been raised in his contemplative consciousness and sensitive soul, Pash could not have let himself be a puppet in the hands of prevailing dominant class' ideology. Pash wanted his poetry to serve as a trumpet which will awaken the people from their slumber and to enter into the new world of classless society.

It was the Post-Progressive period of poetry. In Punjabi poetry the era of rebellious poetic ideology began with Pash's poetry and it is the only Pash to whom revolutionary poetry is credited. The Naxalite movement was one of the rebellious or revolutionary movements of India in that period. In order to change this fallacious political system Naxalites' adopted revolt of armed struggle as one of the main strategies. However it failed in establishing its roots in common people and the political scenario but it attracted literati section of the society. It was inequality that gave birth to this movement. Pash was one of the leading poets of that phase. Pash was deeply influenced by Marxism and he made it the base of his poetry. When Pash started writing poetry this movement was on its peak. Being in touch with Naxalities, he heartily backed this movement. Though he acknowledged the theme of its revolt but he adopted method of poetry to revolt against the ideologies of the system. As a movement Naxalism aimed to bring a change in almost every field of society along

with political power. This the reason why thematic concerns of Pash's poetry are based on socio-political and socio-economical relations of society.

Loh Katha (A Tale of Steel), the first collection of his poetry is the literary product of his revolutionary activities. In *Loh Katha* (A Tale of Steel), the poetic hero represented wrath of the youth against the contemporary conventions and dominating scenario of the system. Pash's deep longing for revolution can easily be seen in his poetry. In this collection of Pash, leaving behind the old traditions of Punjabi poetry he established new methods and principles for his poetry.

Ud de Bazan Magar (After the Flying Hawks), Pash's second volume of poetry is a vindication of his growing revolutionary sentiments. In this volume instead of limiting his struggle to the armed, he interrogated structures of the society related to power and used it as a weapon to awaken social revolution in the sleeping spirit of masses. As a Folk-hero Pash openly challenged constitution, bureaucratic, religion, social and economic system, political system, etc. He declared them to be responsible for the injustices, backwardness, superstition, exploitation, poverty and inhuman behaviour. In short we can say he unmasked the hidden truth of the dominant ideology.

In his works he referred the comrades (Leftists) as rotten flowers, stepping stones, seeds of a thorny tree, tattered basket to the power because they had parliamentary approaches and also had partnership with class in rule.

You are the seeds of a thorny tree

Or a tattered basket

That can hold nothing. (62)

Pash's third collection of poetry *Sade Samia Vich* (In Our Times), is an excellent example of his poetic maturity. This collection of his works showed a gradual change in his attitude to bring the transformation in the existing norms of the state. "Comrade Naal Galbaat" (A Conversation with the Comrade) is a noteworthy illustration of his maturity towards his poetry and political system. He felt contemptible with so called Comrades (leftists), when, in the very beginning of the poem, he says:

O cold cauldron! I salute you

And the times seething within you.

O you limping bird! I salute you

And the sky petrified in you.
O yogi of the blazing forests!
I salute your damp asceticism, and
Your god turned to ashes. (Ghai 182)

Pash's fourth and last collection of poetry was published posthumously in 1989. This collection comprises poems which show his attitude towards the doctrines of fundamentalist and obscurantist philosophies dominating in that era.

Pash advocated many recurring thematic patterns in his rebellious poems like "Loha" (Steel), "Inj Hi Sahi" (Let It Be), "Toofana Ne Kade Maar Nahin Khadhi" (Storms Have Never Been Defeated), "Bharat", "Yudh Ate Shanti" (War and Peace), "Mera Hun Huk Banada" (It's My Right Now) etc.

Hands are given not merely to toil
They are also given to break a tyrant's hand. (93)

Through these poems he dragged down gigantic mammoth of the state from his tusks and encouraged masses for the revolution.

After being liberated from the Romantic phase progressive poetry was being attacked different side. It was during this period when Pash entered into arena of Punjabi poetry. In this context Sukhdev Singh says, "It was being tried to define poetry as a 'pure-aesthetic sense' or a 'pure-bliss' providing word design, free from every kind of moral and social responsibility" (132). Some critics tried to define poetry as a source of mere aesthetic satisfaction and some tried to define it as a source of propaganda. Pash was aware of his duties as a poet, moving ahead from these two approaches, Pash challenged the system through his poetry. In this context his poems like "Khulli Chithi" (Open Letter), "Shabad Kala Te Kavita" (Words Art and Poetry), "Jithe Kavita Kkhatam Nahi Hundi" (Where Poetry Does Not End), and "Inkar" (I Refuse), are noteworthy. Sukhdev Singh says, "Addressed to the supporters of formalist poetics, in an authoritative and satirical style, these poems do not create any illusion about his creative insight" (132). These works can be defined as Pash's "poetic-proclamation".

Listen, you who write letters to your ladyloves:
If the tip of your pen is barren
Then don't abort the sheets on which you write. (Ghai 68)

Poetry as an art of creativity works with its theme and form parallelly. It is necessary to analyse poetic style and form along with the novelty of the theme. Before delivering any judgement regarding any work it becomes mandatory to understand its style and various technicalities. Pash uniquely used constructive methods like satires, symbols, figurative expressions, language style which acts as a soul of any work. He adopted free verse genre in his poetry to express his emotions and because of his style of writing in free verse he was considered as a king of free verse. While analyzing it becomes crystal clear that he was totally against pre-established stereotyped methods. He neither followed the bonny codes prevailing in that era nor he considered poetry as a mean of entertainment. Instead he strongly opposed this idea of poetic art.

You don't know where I stand among the poets
It is as if an emaciated cur should gatecrash
At a sizzling nautch performance. (Ghai 151)

Language which is the important medium to share our feelings and expressions to the outer world plays great role in Pash's poetry. His language is the language of common man, farmers, labourers, etc. In his poetry he developed his words crossing all the borders of language. He wisely used different illustrations depicting the cultural level of the language. His poetry is full of myths, historical references and idioms. His poetry is full of this type of vocabulary:

Wives (*swania*), moth (*bhamakkar*), trough (*buthal*), grain bin (*bhdola*), village council (*suth*), restlessness (*dhudku*), outskirts (*firni*), threshing floor (*pirh*), cop (*glota*), palanquin (*dola*), spinning wheel (*charkha*), manifesto (*dastawej*), maiden (*aullhar*), mourning (*matam*), over-excited (*bhawantry hoi*), pool (*chhapar*), fingertips (*pote*).

Pash made ample use of rural, natural and harsh imagery like 'Fragrance of coriander', 'thigh muscle rippled like fish', 'horny palms would have smiled' etc. reflecting deeper meaning. Poetic images that provide sensational knowledge are divided into five categories that is tactile (touch), thermal (heat and cold), olfactory (smell), gustatory (taste), and kinesthetic (sensations of movement). These kinds of images can easily be traced in Pash's poetry.

Pash also used another literary device known as satire. His flog of satire pours both on the unconscious souls of people and hypocritical leaders. his inner fire came on the surface through these satires, at times it became little abusive and harsh but he never begged for justice.

Another aspect in Pash's poetry is annihilation of myths. In every society there are some rules and conventions meant for people which are against them. Pash demolished these myths by adopting new methods. According to him he didn't break myths consciously as he answered in an interview to Sukhwinder Singh Randhawa, Pash says,

I can say only this, as you say that I am very consciously busy towards breaking myths, it didn't happen like this. When the myths prevailing in the present time lost their value, a pain takes birth, a contrast takes birth (151).

Thus it can be concluded that to bring transformation he adopted the method of revolution. He binds his art with social context slamming the conventional frame. His poetry acted as a mirror for the society. He is considered as a universal poet because of his unbiased criticism of evils of the society establishing a new and unique rebellious era in Punjabi poetry. He exposed every injustice brilliantly with the use of multilingual vocabulary and various literary devices like symbols, metaphors, imagery, satires etc. Pash was a poet by choice, not by profession. According to my point of view he actually proved that "Pen" is the deadliest than all other weapon to achieve your rights. Although more than three decades have passed after his death, but still his words are alive in our thoughts especially his famous poem "Sab ton Khatarnak" which shows utter hopelessness in that society. As Pash writes,

*Sab to khatarnak hunda hai
Murda shanti nal bhr jana
Na hona tadap da, sb sehan kr jana
Ghar ton niklna kmm te
Te kmm ton ghar jana
Sab to khatarnak hunda hai
Sade supnean da mrjana.(Pash)*

The most dangerous thing is to be filled with stillness
Not to feel any agony and bear it all
Leaving home for work and from work to home
The most dangerous thing is the death of our dreams(Trans.)

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