PASH

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From: Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.
Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

PASH

by

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First Published 1999

ISBN 81-260-0776-1

Rs. 25

Typeset at Print India and printed at Elegant Printers, New Delhi.

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Pash: Life and Experience

Pash was the most gifted Punjabi poet of the seventies and the eighties. His real name was Avtar Singh Sandhu, but it was his pen-name, Pash, that actually charmed him. But for a few amateur poems in the beginning, hardly anything appeared under his real name. All the books he published during his life-time, the journals he edited and the letters he wrote, carried only his pen-name. It was the semantic zone of the word, Pash, that charmed his innovative mind. After all, it is to innovation that the tone and tenor of the word appeal. No wonder, only once for a while in his poem 'Taithon Binna' (Without You) included in his last collection *Saade Samian Vich* had he this to say with regard to his real name:

> Without you Avtar Singh Sandhu is Pash
> And as that is nothing else besides. (p. 59)

This also was said in playful complaint. It is doubtful if any truly felt regret impelled this utterance. Thus the thought of revising this terminal decision never came to him so as to render his ethnic and religious identity residual though not false in his eyes. After all, his pen-name heralded his deeply embedded wish to become a revolutionary poet. His avid reading of Pablo Neruda and Bertolt Brecht convinced him that to be a revolutionary poet in Punjabi, it was essential to negotiate poetry from below both in terms of its poetics and practice. By laying bare all sorts of barbarities and tearing apart all types of false ideologies, only this poetry it was that could enable him to reckon with life in the dark times in which he was to live and die.

The semantic zone and no less so the phonetic ring of his pen-name hearkened for Pash the agenda that he set for

becoming a revolutionary poet. It was in early youth that he took this pen-name. Then he must have coined it on his own from such a name as Pashi or Pasho, popularly of village girls during the period of his adolescence. Only later on he must have known that the noun and adjective forms of this word, as derived from *Farsi* and become current in Punjabi speech, crystalised his poetic agenda further. This knowledge must have come as a pleasant surprise to him.

In its noun form, the word Pash stands for the dispenser who by dispensing sweetness around tries to blunt the edge of pain making life so bitter for the people. To begin with, it was this benevolent view that he wished the poet to uphold without any hitch whatsoever. This was a romantic view with melodic tone, soon to lose its charm in his eyes. Its opposite that the adjective form forwarded, so subverted the benevolent view that for quite some time he reserved all his ire for its false message. In its adjective form, the word stands for falling apart which, in dialectical tension with its other signification, dispenses with all cynicism and nihilism of the mind. As a nexus of both, it connotes their revolutionary alignment arising from the deepest recesses of the poetic practice.

(1)

There was a lot both in the nature and nurture of Pash that enabled him to reckon with the challenging task of becoming a revolutionary poet. His (a) village-background, (b) peasant upbringing, (c) commitment to human relationships, (d) impeded schooling, (e) unimpeded learning, and (f) full-blooded encounter with the world at large drove him supremely to reckon with them. From his birth to his death, such was their drive that this challenging task became the crux of his agenda. He neither deferred nor demurred its travails.

Pash was born on September 9, 1950 in Talwandi Salem a small village on the southern fringe of the Doaba region in Punjab. As a conjugation of words current in *Farsi* for the digit two and water respectively, Doaba stands for the land lying between two rivers which in this case happen to be Satluj and Beas respectively. The village in which Pash was born is situated towards Satluj in the backward area of the region otherwise regarded as highly literate in the state. Surprisingly enough, it was backward on the eve of the post-independence era as well though the people, to compensate for the lag suffered during the colonial era, had begun taking to education fast.

Pash was born in a Jat Sikh family settled for generations in this peripheral village. From adolescence, the rural milieu disposed him to inculcate an insider's view of life in the countryside around. Owning ten acres of land partly cultivable and partly barren, his grandfather had probably found it adequate for his family's subsistence. No wonder the urge to migrate abroad, that in the twenties and the thirties had caught the male population of the Doaba region so much, did not arouse his interest. Pash's father, Sohan Singh Sandhu, might have gone the way of his forefathers if the advent of national independence in 1947 had not enthused him with some new hope. Though poetic and imaginative by nature, he felt an urge to join the Indian army both to serve the country and carve out a supplementary source of income for the family. From childhood, Pash had thus the occasion to be away with his father at the place of his posting. This disposed him to cultivate an outsider's view of life as well.

This double disposition made Pash intimately responsive to and minutely observant of the varying and varied aspects of the village-life. If its natural scenario, mode of livelihood and seasonal ceremonies enchanted him, its poverty, torpor and bleakness disenchanted him no less. Typical of enchantment is the following entry

available in *Pash di Diary* (Pash's Diary) posthumously published after his death:

> So beautiful was the night today! All through I had intimate talk with it, with dew-covered wheat lying asleep on the earth's vast bridal bed, with heaps of sugar-cane stalks aglow in the moonlight, with carts standing still like orphans, with thatched huts showing the warm as distinct from the cold, with mangers overlaid with gloom, with sugar-cane crops known for long, with sand holding forth a soothing sight and with forefathers calmly buried in their graves. (January 1, 1974)

Corresponding to this sensuous and soothing evocation of the natural scenario achieved largely through breathless use of phrases, is the following description of labouring men, women and girls of the village. Rather than sensuous and soothing, it is bare and graphic in detail:

> With the waning of winter, work is waxing. Weeding will occupy the farmers for quite some time to come. Ground nuts harvested of late are yet to yield grains. Scavenging and cooking don't let the women be idle in any season. Men have kept themselves busy in string-twining. Is milching or carrying of chapatis to the fields less of a job for the girls? (January 4, 1974)

(2)

It was in his mid-twenties that Pash wrote these entries almost in a row. The disposition to observe the varying and varied aspects of the natural scenario and social life of the countryside must have come naturally to him in adolescence if not earlier in childhood. All this made him precocious to the core of his being. So much so his passage through schooling got impeded in contrast with his unimpeded pursuit of learning. It was in the neighbouring village named Khiva that he was put to

school at about the age of six. Both at the primary and middle stage, scholarship examinations were in vogue in those times. Though the certificate awarded to him in 1964 on passing the middle examination mentions his score as good, yet there is no evidence to the effect that he either sat or was found worthy to sit for any scholarship examination. Rather than seek admission for matriculation after that, he joined a technical school in the nearby city of Kapurthala for doing a vocational diploma from there.

Several reasons might have impelled this abrupt turn in his schooling. Possibly, traditional schooling with its stress upon stock subjects requiring repetition, retention and memorisation did not grip his precocious mind. He could also not be nihilistic and cynical to the extent of foregoing this monotonous routine and taking to cultivation like his fore-fathers. His father's military career held out the promise of innovation and experience. Then discipline was on the anvil to warn against reckless adventure. Moreover in the post-independence era, there was a sudden spurt of interest in vocational training to which his father's advice might have lent more vigour. For all that, Pash did not complete this vocational schooling. He left it in between and to do his matriculation joined a high school in Jalandhar cantonment. At this stage, his parents, particularly his mother, insisted that he should have joined the neighbouring village school if at all his sole aim was to pass the matriculation examination. This insistence was both candid and sensible. However, it failed to carry any weight with Pash and his precocious mind.

Even when not on the rolls, he decided to stay on at Jalandhar. He was so enamoured of a benign lady-teacher that he chose even to defy his parents who had three other children, one son elder to Pash and two daughters younger to him, to look after. Such was the teacher's charisma that a bit of a change in her name was enough to add further charm to his pen-name that a couple of years after he

coined under some different impulse. This experience was affable to enrich his precocious mind but was not adequate to sustain his body. For bodily sustenance, he is said to have taken to arduous labour for a while. This also explains his subsequent resolve to seek recruitment in the Border Security Force, presumably against the advice of his parents. Feeling that this also was like a leap in the dark, he did not continue with that training. Leaving it in between, he came back only to find himself at the cross-roads of life. At this stage, he had no alternative but to settle down in his village.

(3)

All this happened in the penultimate year of the sixties. By this time, the Naxalbari insurrection had broken out and a militant movement, solely relying upon armed struggle, had spread particularly in West Bengal, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. It had found its votaries in Punjab as well more so in the Doaba region claiming inheritance from the Babar Akalis and Bhagat Singh of the pre-Independence era. The heroic struggle that they had waged against the colonial rule in the twenties held over-whelming appeal for the Naxalites of the sixties. Feeling himself sequestered in the village and at the crossroads of life, Pash came into contact with those rebellious elements. As a result, he began writing what in his posthumously published *Pash dian Chithian* (Pash's Letters) he came to term as "bellowing poetry." (p. 37) Not stopping at that, he also began to flaunt himself as a votary of armed struggle in Punjab.

To all intents and purposes, he came to be known as a rebel. As things would have it, the owner of a brick-kiln got killed in the nearby town of Nakodar. No doubt, the killers were self-proclaimed Naxalites and they took credit for eliminating this enemy of the people. Pash knew them well and was therefore arrested on May 10, 1970, allegedly

for committing this murder. Not even twenty at the time of his arrest, he was kept behind bars for more than a year. To begin with, this internment might have come as traumatic to his precocious mind. Ultimately, it proved dramatic for his poetic practice that took account of tempering it involved for the youth at that moment of time.

Released from jail after more than a year, he returned to the village to reflect deeply upon violence, revolution, socialism, cultural heritage, social institutions and political ideologies. He settled down in the village and brought out several journals in a row for imparting ideological direction and cultural awakening to the people. The first one was *Rohle Baan* (Raging Arrows) brought out in 1973 with full collaboration of those who had remained active in the Naxalite movement. The inflammatory matter which those elements insisted upon publishing did not go well with the deeply inquisitive and reflective nature of Pash. Realising that around it had "conglomerated disparate elements of insurrectionary type," (*Chithian*, p. 72) he dissociated himself completely from its publication. Then in 1974, he brought out *Siar* (Furrow) which aimed at publishing literary and cultural matter. Since its supporters were mostly "unemployed youngmen, sons of peasants and students themselves incapable of rendering any financial assistance," (*Chithian, p. 81*) so this more promising venture also came to its unwanted end. The last one to come out was *Hoka* (Call) in the same year which on account of financial constraints could not continue for long.

The net result of all these failed ventures was that poetic practice got the better of his political activity. This does not however mean that from now onwards he began to seem harmless and docile to the police personnel and the authorities. Any strike announced or agitation launched signalled his arrest. No wonder, Pash was

arrested in 1972 when Punjab witnessed wide-spread student unrest. Suspected to be the impulse if not the brain behind this unrest, he was kept in jail allegedly for breach of peace in the state. Again in 1974, he was apprehended when the Railway employees went on a country-wide strike. During the Emergency, he was behind bars for unspecified period of time. This time he had the occasion to witness the steep contrast between the wretched treatment meted out to the ordinary prisoners and the great care taken of political leaders irrespective of their party affiliations. The jail authorities tended to regard the political leaders as living martyrs whereas the ordinary prisoners were wretched corpses in their eyes.

(4)

Now he was ripe for another crucial change in his life. Till then a bachelor, he professed erotic fervour for the female body. Largely unconsummated, this fervour was characteristic of village-life in which openness, born of warm contact with nature, folklore and autochthony, kept up uneasy tension with restraint imposed by family constraints, community considerations and mutually recognisable responsibilities. Several entries are there in his *Diary* which express his erotic feelings for the female body in an untrammeled way. Typical of it is the following that has some village-girl as its addressee:

> Today is the night of the full moon, o my love! You might be in the know of what all this means. If not any time, you may ask of it now from the sobs uttered by my eyes. Do you know why at quarter past eight I have come out of sleep? I was aware of what in the next quarter of the hour was in store for me. I knew that the bend in the street cannot be that callous. (June 4, 1976).

At the same time, he felt that the focus of his erotic fervour should not be a complex only of curves,

protuberances, rotundities, apertures and physical charms. If not ideological, the female is required to have some mental orientation. This perception led him to think about marriage which could not be off set by chance encounters and furtive meetings. Of course, he ran from pillar to post to marry the girl "so beautiful that her sight could have made even birds fall fainting from the sky." (*Chithian*, p. 146) When this too romantic a wish could not actualise, he decided to go in for an arranged marriage.

He devised two arguments to justify his decision. Firstly, he came to realise that wife and beloved were destined to keep unbridgeable distance from each other. As he ironically and somewhat bitterly put to himself, "Beloved and wife are two zones of the globe which cannot have the warm sunlight to fall upon them at the same time. So far beloved has never figured as wife and nor will ever do so in future. After marriage ceremony is consummated, no female can dare behave as beloved." (*Chithian*, p. 113) Secondly, he realised that howsoever deep his despair at not having succeeded to marry the girl of his dream, he must not let himself be swept away by its tramelling turbulence. After all, "even those who aim at world-historical changes have to pass through deeply dark moments of despair." (*Chithian*, p. 208).

Having arrived at a decision beyond chance encounters and furtive meetings with the female, he went in for arranged marriage with some one who in charm and grace definitely fell short of the maiden of his dream. However, marital union led him thus to reflect upon the turbulence it entailed:

> If you have ever felt a woman as integral to your life, you might have known how her sudden contact with your innermost self leaves you like a dumb person who, while drowning in the stream at the time of bath, has no word except a frightening shudder to

call the people upon the bank to come to his help. (*Diary* January 17, 1982)

(5)

This surrealistic entry, couched in broken and syncopated syntax, gives an idea of what he experienced in terms of marital union beyond the chance meetings and furtive moments his erotic fervour had reserved for him. As he saw his wife busying herself in domestic chores, he became aware of her human presence beyond power-relations akin to the family structure. Getting across all conflicts to the contrary, he realised the importance of rootedness in life of which home was the central symbol. To feel at home was not possible without a house of one's own of which it was in fact the objective correlative. So to feel at home in the house which his father had raised anew, Pash negotiated a source of living for himself, his wife and infant daughter.

As is the way of life, some source of income should have helped him to settle down by now. After-all, he had passed the matriculation examination as a private candidate and also done a teacher's diploma course in a training institute as well. In other words, he was duly qualified to be a teacher in some government or private school. However, that was not to be because his revolutionary nature and ideological commitment could not be set aside. It was difficult, rather impossible, for him to fit himself into a routine and supinely observe rules and regulations, restrictions and constrictions even of the professional sort.

Under the circumstances, he thought of starting his own national model school in a neighbouring village. It was a stupendous task to get along without financial support from any quarters. This was another leap in the dark only with the difference that some glimmer was there to beckon him to the other end. So all the jobs from a

peon's to that of the head, he himself would perform with a rare feeling of candour. Such mottos as (a) God is by cowards invented, (b) mutual strife is what religion teaches, (c) only fools dream of life beyond, (d) illiterate woman will forever remain servile, and (e) humanity observes no caste-system, give inkling of the norms and values which he wanted his students to inculcate and cultivate in the course of their school education.

For all his dedication and devotion, it was a formidable task to go on with this project. The helping hand that his wife lent could not cause any material change in the situation. The fees charged from the students were too inadequate to sustain them and keep the school going. Even the grant that the Punjab Sahit Academy sanctioned Pash as literary award for a year in 1985 went down the drain. Howsoever forbidding, these constraints could not daunt him from the task. Undaunted, he might have carried on with educating the village children had the Punjab turmoil not befallen first to dislocate him and ultimately to put an end to his life.

(6)

The climatic moment for the Punjab turmoil was to occur in the first week of June 1984 when a military confrontation took place between the Indian army and the Sikh terrorists in the precincts of the Golden Temple. Resulting in the demolition of the Akal Takhat and the desecration of the sanctum sanctorum, it unleashed widespread terrorism in Punjab. Before that organised terrorism aiming at targeted and untargeted killing had held sway. However, in April it was that the Sikh terrorists finalised a list of four persons for killing in the area in which befell Pash's village. Since his name topped the list, so physical mobility became a liability for him. Otherwise carefree by nature, Pash then stopped throwing caution to the wind at least. In a moment of circumspection he

realised that "nothing was impossible for them to achieve." (*Chithian* p. 149) Much against his carefree nature, he began shifting his place to sleep, with a score of friends keeping his company during day-time. He could not give even an inkling of this to his family members because the terror of it would have completely unnerved them.

This was a dilemma which his presence upon the scene could ill-afford to resolve. So he thought it prudent to avert it by retreating from the scene. The occasion for this was provided by his younger sister who after her marriage had settled in U.S.A. With sponsorship from her, he went over there as a visitor. Transitory as his stay was, it would have been in his interest to go strictly by the norms and avoid any and every occasion to get in the eye of the storm. But that was not to be because, just after arrival, he assumed the editorship of *Anti-1947*, a journal bitterly opposed to the activities of the accomplices of the Sikh terrorists in Punjab. The very first issue of the journal he edited, offered so powerful a critique of the Sikh terrorists, their accomplices in U.S.A., their insidious designs and perverse contentions that he became an eye-sore for them all. In this way, the security that he sought there brought only insecurity in its train.

As a visitor in U.S.A., it was also obligatory for him to get his visa renewed every year from some other country. Going strictly by the norms, to take some job was also illegal though throwing all legality to the wind, visitors invariably do something to supplant their income. He also took up a job barely enough to meet his expenses. When the time for the renewal of visa came, he went to England and was able to achieve his purpose. A year after that, he returned to India again for the renewal of his visa. When he went to U.S.A., the authorities refused to let him land at the Los Angeles airport. Certain quarters had lodged against him a complaint to the effect that he had illegally

taken up a job during his earlier stay in that country. Deported to India, he returned to his village, as it were, again to be in the eye of the storm.

Back in the village, he for some time lost all hope of being with his wife and daughter who, by that time, had reached USA on their own. Meanwhile, some travel agent managed to get him visa for Brazil from where he could enter USA in one way or the other. By this time, Sikh terrorists operating in the area around his village had got a message allegedly from their accomplices in USA that under no circumstances should he be allowed to board the plane. So on March 23, 1988, he was gunned down at his tube-well where in the morning he had gone to have his bath in the company of Hans Raj, his bosom-friend. This was one day before his departure for Delhi from where he was scheduled to board the plane for Brazil. This also happened to be the martyrdom-day of Bhagat Singh who in 1931 had laid down his life for the freedom of the country. Twenty three years old and in the prime of youth at the time of his martyrdom, Bhagat Singh has been a hero for the leftist youth in India and Punjab in particular. Meeting his end on such a solemn day as that, Pash, not yet thirty eight at the time of his death, has become the paradigm of a revolutionary poet. Thus ended the valuable life of a person who in his poem 'Main vida hunda haan' (Now I take leave of you) available in *Saade Samian Vich* had so poignantly articulated his overflowing desire to love and live:

You drop all this from your mind, my love.
Except this
That I had intense longing to live,
That neck-deep I wanted to delve in life;
You live my share of life, my love,
Live my share of life, as well. (p. 9)

2

Ideology and Structure of Feeling

All the poetry that Pash wrote for two decades almost, was deeply embedded with ideology. This does not mean that his poems articulated ideologemes *i.e.* ideas embued with class-character and its consciousness only. Their main concern was with structure of feeling into which went his emotional responses, awareness of changing relationships, doubt about traditional values and his intense desire to change or renew them. In this way, the production, reception and effect of his poetry sought to delve the terrain of alignment that lay deeper than the plane of ideological commitment. Commitment involves a conscious, political choice with the premise that any concern away from it is not of much consequence. Alignment on the other hand relates also to the cultural unconscious, to impulses drawn from nature, the individual and historical past, inherited mores of perception and the linguistic potential of their expression. All the same, ideology awards them a focus or direction that in Pash's poetry cannot be set aside. As a result, the understanding of his ideology is essential for reckoning with the complex of feelings from which his poems drew their form and style, structure and texture and tone and tenor in, as it were, an innovative way.

(1)

It was under the impact of the Naxalite upsurge that Pash set upon his ideological orientation. A precocious and inquisitive mind as he had from the very beginning, he did not rest content with the complex of ideas this upsurge forwarded for bringing about a political revolution in the country. Feeling that the ideological orientation thus gathered failed to reckon with the human impulse to turn

the world upside down so as to redirect the people to human and humane ideals, he turned to Leon Trotsky, simultaneously the most glorified and maligned revolutionary theoretician of the twentieth century. This was also a transitory phase because cultural immanence so engrossed Pash in the subsequent years that what mattered for him then was politics of even the invariant factors of life *i.e.* religion, patriotism, marriage, culture and their other configurations. Had he lived longer, even this would not have been the ultimate stage of his ideological orientation. All the same, there is a trajectory that his ideological orientation covered in his short and eventful life. To uncover that in all its intricacy and depth is essential for grasping his poetic concerns, their efficacy and veracity.

The Naxalite upsurge, that set Pash on the ideological trail, was sparked off by a tribal uprising in May 1967 in the Naxalbari area of West Bengal. Conglomerating about sixty small villages, this area was inhabited by Santhal, Oras, Mund and Rajbansi tribes, known to be around from primitive times. Organised into an insurrectionary mob by Kanu Sanyal, a local leader, they occupied the granaries of the landowners, put to fire the documents relating to their indebtedness and took charge of schools and other welfare organs. In a perfunctory way, they even redistributed the land amongst themselves. This initiative taken by the oppressed and the deprived, the insulted and humiliated, was felt to have apocalyptic proportions. Militant ideologues compared the Naxalbari area with Yenan that Mao Tse Tung had occupied in the twenties for initiating the total liberation of China.

The official Chinese press and organs eloquently pleaded its cause all over the world. For landless labourers, daily workers, tribal youngmen and university students come under the hypnotic influence of the Cultural Revolution, a world-historical change in India seemed very

much in the offing. Sections of people earlier affiliated with the communist parties rallied to the Naxalite upsurge which promised immediate if not instantaneous revolution through armed struggle, individual killing, class hatred and optimistic will without pessimistic intellect to restrict it. In the ultimate instance, this promise drew strength from the plea that Mao Tse Tung (1893-1975) whose *Red Book* was the last word in ideology was also the supreme leader, theoretician, thinker and helsman of not only China but of the entire world, including India.

No doubt, India of the sixties had terrain ready for this sort of ideology to catch the fancy of the excitable youth and the subaltern people. After all, the whole promise, that democratic institutions, educational programmes, and industrialising projects had held for bringing a socialist society, had vanished into thin air. Instead, economic inequality, corruption and bureaucratisation had grown to spread discontent all around. For instant change to catch the fancy of the poor and deprived people seemed natural at this stage. In desperation, they bothered not to review what was authentic or inauthentic in its projection. The inauthentic factors which both mired and marred its perspective did not bother them at all. They were occupied with dream indistinct from nightmare and with schizophrenia verging on xenophobia. This state of affairs prevailed particularly in West Bengal where the optimum leader of the Naxalite upsurge, namely Charu Mazmudar, was less of an ideologue and more of Durga's votary.

(2)

The Naxalite upsurge had its repercussion in Punjab as well. The reason was economic and political but more was it historical and cultural. The Green Revolution had resulted in doubling production but the inordinate increase in the price of fertilisers, pesticides and insecticides had withheld its gains from reaching the small

and even the medium farmers. Only the big farmers had gained from this much flaunted production but they were in minuscule number. They were hardly landlords of the type which Mao Tse Tung thought depicted as enemies of the people. Likewise, agitations launched over the years for linguistic reorganisation of the state had angered the people against the central government. Yet this anger was not of the type that could sway them against the social and political system. In other words, economic factors underlining life in Punjab would not have by themselves given fillip to the Naxalite unrest to the extent witnessed for several years.

The historical and cultural factors so overlapped them that social unrest, engendered by the Naxalites, got into the fabric of Punjab politics. In the first quarter of the century, Punjabis had been in the forefront of militant movements launched either from within or without to drive out the British from India. They had felt as much native to the country as to their land of the five rivers. The Gadarites had launched their movement from U.S.A. and most of the killed, hanged or imprisoned ones for life were those who had migrated from Punjab. The Babar Akalis had sought to sacrifice their all for wreaking vangeance upon the alien rulers to undo the ignominy heaped upon the people. Hindustan Republican Army and Naujawan Bharat Sabha were other organisations which came to the fore to restore the national honour of the country.

The memories of desperate heroism and reckless adventure, which incidents and persons associated with these movements and organisations evoked, were fresh as ever in the minds of those who responded to the Naxalite upsurge. In fact, they believed that the Naxalite upsurge was meant to perpetuate the earlier struggles. It also sought to restore glory to those who had earlier suffered and died in vain for the people's cause. For the Naxalites, the name of the celebrated martyr, Bhagat Singh, was a

byword worthy of all emulation. One person the Naxalites targeted for killing had forty years earlier deposed actually against the great martyr.

Finding himself at the crossroads, Pash responded to these developments with enthusiasm and vigour. Symptomatic of it is the entry prefacing his *Diary* that topographically appears written like the map of the country. Beginning from the Himalayan top in the north, it ends at the Kanyakumari tip in the south, spreading over the whole terrain from west to east. Meant to convey his perception of India as a battlefield for armed struggle, it reads as under:

> That India be the personal property of a few mauraders dealing with the people as if they were buffaloes and cows is not at all acceptable to me. Nor do I concede that ordinary persons be coerced and beaten at will. India is close to my heart but closer are the people numbering crores who, as labourers and farmers, are coerced and dispossessed of all their belongings. Capitalists and landlords who are a few in number have bled my loved country to nothing. So will it remain till these butchers are not deprived of this ontrageous right. What after all is meant by democracy and freedom? The biggest joke that the Law of the Republic plays with the starving labourer and ragged farmer is of granting the right to own property to their heart's content. Every clause bestows the right upon them to increase their wealth at will and keep it intact as well. This freedom gives the rich the right to exploit, at the same time extending to the poor the right to be thoroughly exploited. When the people somewhat exert themselves to jolt this freedom then their voice gets drowned in blood. This I wish to declare that with the country we stand steadfast but not with these killers at all.

The text of the entry is at places interspersed with blots signifying bloodshed. These blots are in abundance in the ocean around both the coasts. It means that so much bloodshed will take place upon the land that it will completely drown the landlords and capitalists who exploit the people with impunity.

However, it goes immensely to Pash's credit that he did not continue mythicising his perception. When he felt that things were actually otherwise, he did not hesitate to revise his perception and search for alternative explanation. No wonder, he wished all the Naxalite groups to forge unity. Feeling that even this wish was somewhat dream-like, he further contended, "There is yet no ground for this unity though all the groups are in search of it." (*Chithian*, p. 69) Much as Karl Marx wrote about the Parisian insurrectionists of 1848, Pash awarded to the Naxalites also this much place in history:

> These persons are like those anarchists who disrupt the inertia overtaking the countries, spread strife around, sometimes make futile sacrifices in excess only to prepare the terrain for popular movements to flourish. However, their names drop out of history, time gets oblivious of them at the same time that it acknowledges their achievement. (*Chithian*, p. 37)

(3)

Apart from personal experience, it was the study of Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) that delivered Pash from intellectual pessimism, come to him in reaction to the wilful optimism of the Naxalite upsurge. He was in dire need of an ideology that could synthesise intellectual pessimism and wilful optimism so as to help him understand the world-situation in a more integral way. The Maoist doctrine of bifurcating the world into the city versus the countryside did not satisfy him at this juncture. Trotsky's view of permanent revolution and incessant struggle of

humanity for world-wide emancipation came to him as an antidote then. Trotsky had held that socialist revolution could occur in a single country even without getting consolidated in face of imperialist onslaught the world over. Any effort to postpone it meant collaboration with the imperialists. This not only brought in party despotism but also distorted socialist perspective in the long run.

The seventies witnessed stupendous upsurge of Trotsky's ideology, particularly among the New Left intellectuals and university students. They projected him as an oracular genius who was meted out great injustice in the late twenties and the thirties. Deprivation of power, exile in Turkey and Mexico, extreme isolation in face of Stalinist denigration and his assassination were meant to crucify him at the cross of socialism itself. The subsequent three decades also had not delivered justice to him. Except for a couple of organisations like the Fourth International, communist parties the world over had declared him a pariah to be shunned and despised. They had gone to the extent of imputing malevolent motives to this prophet treated as an outcast then. So much so, even Mao Tse Tung, so ardent an advocate of the Cultural Revolution, had not looked kindly at his tragic fate.

Pash, who owed his ideological orientation to the Naxalite upsurge, got disillusioned with its schematic and perverse propaganda, particularly during his imprisonment. After his release, he came into contact with university students and intellectuals professing revolution in academic circles. It was this contact that gave him the occasion to go through two books of Trotsky *i.e. The Autobiography* and *Nineteen Hundred and Five* which in a way shook him to his roots. His immediate reaction was of enthusiasm coupled with desire to go through all of Trotsky's writings. As he put it, "From these two books I have learnt a lot . . . quite soon I shall get hold of his other

writings as well. How phenomenal is his intellectual audacity"? (*Chithian*, pp. 39-40)

Of his intellectual audacity, Pash must have come across several evidences in these writings. Born of Jewish parents, Trotsky was from early youth audacious enough as to challenge the mightiest of the thinkers. Even Lenin had to face his challenge as a result of which he came to recognise how indispensable his adversary was for revolution in Russia. During the failed revolution of 1905, it was Trotsky whose eloquence so foregrounded the people's miseries in the Duma that they found their sole deliverer in him. After the revolution of 1917, Lenin put him in charge of the Red Army. He organised it so implacably that all the external and internal enemies were routed in no time. His was an unprecedented defence of the revolution. Analogous was his language laden with cosmic imagery that cast overwhelming sway upon the inquisitive and poetic mind of Pash.

Without caring what rancour could be in store for him from communist and his erstwhile Naxalite associates, Pash began to plead for initiating Trotsky's study in Punjab. He was happy to observe that "whatever the level, a discussion was going on over Trotsky's ideology in the whole of the country." He wanted this sort of discussion to grow in Punjab as well though "a majority of the communist cadres was likely to assume orthodox position." (*Chithian*, p. 74) Trotsky being a renegade was an allegation of no merit in his eyes. Pash wanted him assessed in the light of "the proletariat's role in the Second World War, his understanding of imperialism and nazism and his theory of the permanent revolution." (*Chithian*, p. 75) In other words, the deep structure of Trotsky's thinking appealed to Pash more than the tactical and ephemeral judgements he had passed upon his adversaries from time to time.

All the same, Pash did not reckon with certain flaws in this deep structure of Trotsky's thinking. Trotsky's impulse to reduce actuality to abstraction was his Achilles heal as a result of which his intellectual audacity proved like a ship-wreck in the ocean. Sound in the abstract, his theory of permanent revolution could not garner actual support from the people, wracked as they were by ethnic, religious, cultural and political contradictions, over and above the class-struggle which he visualised them to launch apocalyptically almost. His language laden with symbols, metaphors, references and his style of employing the strategies of analogy, contrast and personification, could impart enthusiasm as of religious fervour. How to inculcate and cultivate the feeling of ever-expanding and ever-deepening hegemony did not come naturally to his high-flown felicity at all. No wonder, he remained supreme so long as Lenin was there to sustain his supremacy. In face of Stalin's malignance, it lost all its potential and ultimately a solitary killer was enough to deliver him into the jaws of death.

(4)

By now, Pash had realised that actual experience rather than abstract ideology should be his concern for poetry. So to grasp life in all its diversity became his forte. How the city and the countryside differed, what marked their respective structures of experience and why the so-called panaceas failed them both, called for his uncanny insight now. Reserving the pronoun 'those' for the city people and 'these' for their counterparts in the countryside, he contrasted their dispensation at the following levels:

> City sense is the collective name for feelings of human insignificance and deprivation caused by swift change in the machine age. Those are bored while these have lagged behind in life. Economic factor is not primary to those but it is everything for these

people. Those have mental experience of objects while these live sheerly at the bodily level. (*Chithian*, p. 38)

Rather than regard their dispensation as pre-determined, Pash attributed it to historical and political factors in which power got embedded in a crucial way. No wonder, he reiterated, "This is, due to a specific juncture, a stage in human growth. The plight of those is caused by knaves while of these is a reward from the naive ones. The plight of those can be redeemed while of these is beyond redemption." (*Chithian*, p. 39)

Certainly, Pash was averse to advocate any romantic view of the village-life. He had no word of praise for naivety, simplicity and nostalgia in which the romantic and idealistic ethos couched it in abundance. On the other hand, he was not inclined to call it vulgar either for the inertia and ignorance which for the educated and sophisticated minds stalked it from times immemorial. In this regard, he found little truth in Trotsky's view that sought to downgrade village life and upgrade city life in rather a nominal way. Perhaps the rural idiocy that even Karl Marx (1818-1883) had attributed to village life in the first flush of revolutionary zeal shown by the Paris workers would not have been approved by Pash without identifying its like in the city life itself.

Evidently, Pash was not carried away by the so-called modernisation. Of course, the gains which had flowed to city life as a consequence of media, literacy and communication-system did miss his registering mind to some extent. Their comparison and contrast it was that charmed him whenever he thought of life and experience in their respective sectors. It is a different matter though that he could not carry his comparative or contrasting project beyond the generic level. Nowhere did it get close to contrapuntal grasp in which motifs of one emerge in the context of the other.

This comparison and contrast drew his attention to the all-pervasive sway of vulgar, obscene and titillating songs composed and sung in imitation of folk-songs. Their consumption was meant for the city people whom they swayed not on account of the performance which could match the competence of the traditional singers but because of mechanical contrivances which could make them available at all and sundry places. Their composers also did not miss his scrutinising eye. He found them not the enemies but the lovers of life bent upon seeing it exhilirating and exciting in a facile, rather superficial, way. No wonder, he was constrained to remark, "The fact of the matter is that they donot want anything. They donot want to be held responsible for anything except their self-glorification and the money they amass through their circulation." (*Chithian*, p. 37)

For all the instant popularity that these songsters gathered, Pash was doubtful if their compositions could survive beyond the present. The durability that was the hall-mark of the folk-songs composed by anonymous performers and their survival in subsequent period in spite of the variations they went through, did not seem to him true of these pseudo-songs at all. Of course, he did not reflect deeply enough upon folklore as the commonsense of the people getting across differences of race, religion, class and gender. Yet the appreciation he reserved for its corpus could not be of pseudo-songs and their titillating consumption.

Religion was another factor that occupied his mind at this juncture. Be that as it may, he did not go into the cultural and spiritual intricacies of its origin and role in life. For example, the way in which the magnificent and malignant forces of nature so affected the life of the people that religion arose to transfigure its dread, fear, hope, pain and experience into faith, did not occupy his thinking. How from anthropomorphic categories, it went on to

imbibe abstract qualities of birth, transmigration, reincarnation, rebirth and communion also did not tickle his curiosity. As against these relatively intractable and magnificent aspects of religion, he scrutinised it's mundane facets *i.e.* its dissemination amongst the people. This scrutiny showed him that persons of different ages responded differently to religious performance at a place of congregation. In this regard, the following entry in his *Diary* is of particular importance:

> I cannot say about the earlier times but at the moment the faith that people have in the gurdwara is rather comical. Amongst women getting old, it grows in proportion to their habit to dole out advice. Amongst women of already advanced age, it gets petrified and hardly any element of hypocrisy is to be found in their attitude. (December 31, 1976)

Another thing that Pash underlined in religious dissemination was its secular import. Here secularism that he had in mind was not what it has come to be understood in the West *i.e.* disbelief of transcendental essence and belief in worldly existence as the essential criteria for balanced and civilised living. What Pash implied was the turn given to this term in India in the post-indepedence era. In that context, it came to denote respect for all religions with the implicit belief that they conveyed the same ethical and spiritual message.

Needless to say, the new meaning the term secularism came to acquire in the Indian context of the post-independent era, grappled only with social and behavioural issues as against its Western connotation that reckoned with philosophical and ideological concerns as well. So for the Western meaning of secularism to grow, religion's, encounter with politics is imperative. Only through this encounter does belief in worldliness get all-encompassing with the open-ended discourse of politics

taking the place of closed rhetoric of theology. In the Indian context, such an encounter is taken as anathema where politics is required to respect all religions which are then expected to keep discreet distance from politics.

Due to this view of secularism, Pash looked at communalism sheerly as perversion. So be it, but why in traumatic times, it becomes the anchor of a community particularly in minority coerced by its antagonists in majority, did not suggest itself to him in a sympathetic vein. Why then the issues of class, age and gender become subservient to that of community did not occupy his inquisitive and eloquent attention. Likewise, the slide of communalism further into fundamentalism, in face of the traumatic times getting more coercive, did not involve his thinking. Later on partially in dramatic terms though, these problems did figure in his poetic discourse. Such were the issues which remained intractable for his poetic imagination.

On the whole, it was cultural immanence that impelled him to grasp life, its institutions, structures and formations. No wonder, his interest got directed towards the practice of hegemony that he defined as "human mastery over nature, a great invention for personal and collective justice." (*Chithian*, p. 187) As yet he was not aware of the profound insights of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) who had raised this category from the political and administrative to the intellectual and cognitive plane. Had Pash lived longer, his aptitude for reflecting upon all the mediating factors of life would certainly have grown in the immanent direction. This is what seems evident from his expanding and deepening view of life. Besides the city and the countryside, the folklore, its vulgarisation amidst city life, religion and it's perversion in communalism, he would have thought deeply over the interface of commonsense and goodsense, mythology and history, society and culture, ethics and politics and language and arts etc. That

they might have then sought reflection and signification in his poetry is a promise held out in all their richness by the following lines. They are drawn from his poem 'Pratibadhta' (Commitment) included in *Saade Samian Vich,* the last collection, he brought out during his life:

We want everything actual
Of life, equality and what not.
As the sun, the wind and the cloud
Remain close to us in houses and fields,
Likewise we want to have
Of polity, belief and joy,
A feel close to our lives.
Mighty ones! we want everything actual. (p. 10)

3

Loh Katha

During his life-time, Pash brought out three collections of poems. The first one was *Loh Katha* 1970 (Iron's Tale) that came out when he was barely twenty years of age. A slim volume of sixty four pages, it contains thirty five poems in all. Several of them are small of ten or twelve lines each. Only three or four are relatively long *i.e.* of fifty to sixty lines. As said in the preface, they are written "in the name of those people whose outcry or sigh arising from their misery had merged into the air regarded as boon for life." (n. p.)

Except for one jail-poem 'Khoobsoorat Pad-Kandhan Jail dian' (Beautiful prison wall-papers) all others seem to have been written when he had settled down in his village after his discharge from the Border Security Force. Come under the spell of the Naxalite upsurge, he was carried away by its ideology of (a) armed insurrection, (b) individual killing, (c) the city versus the countryside dichotomy, and (d) pristine revolution to occur in almost an apocalyptic way. So the first to draw attention are poems which either lay the ground for this ideology to spread or show its hypnotic effect upon those who had embraced it.

(1)

In this regard, 'Bharat' (India) is the first poem to engage attention. It projects his view of India that largely corresponds with the explication of it in a format prefacing his *Diary*. So in the poem the people actually inhabiting the country are shown as those whom illiteracy, backwardness and deprivation have condemned to vegetative existence. No where brought out in the text, the sub-text of the poem

holds that this vegetative existence is worse than animal-living that is not without its quantum of physical indolence and indulgence as well. If anything physical is their's, it is to feed themselves with whatever they lay their hands upon as beings without any sense of time or history:

To me this word
For those sons of the soil stands
Who with shades of trees
Still measure the passing of time,
With no problem except the belly
They, when by hunger oppressed,
Can munch their own bones even. (p. 5)

No wonder, tradition, mythology and culture, which the privileged people flaunt as the greatest blessings bestowed by the country upon the people, have no meaning for them. Ironically enough, these hypnotising terms do not bestow anything valuable upon the exploiters either. They serve their exploitive purpose only as hallowed totems. This paradox bewilders the interlocutor who feels no qualms to show how double-dealing are those whom political power has made the custodians of the country or who take pride in being their acolytes.

In the poem 'Doe te Doe Tinn' (Two and two make three), the interlocutor gets suspicious of presuming the country as a hallowed totem. Afterall, the injustice meted out to the people, the exploitation indulged in with impunity and the corruption current in the name of administration, are the malpractices amidst which this presumption is to hold itself aloft. To believe that for all these abominations, it does hold itself aloft is to bid goodbye even to the elementary level of reason and logic:

If all this you believe
Then two and two make three,
Present is mythical past
And man like spoon is cast. (p. 11)

In these poems, the exploited people are largely from the countryside whom the rich exploiters from the city have driven almost to the verge of barbarity. In the poem 'Loha' (Iron) he associates the proletariat also with the exploited multitude of the countryside. When the locus is the city, the poet's focus is upon the exploiters in particular. So in 'Gaale Saare Phulan de Nann' (For withered flowers) the exploited multitudes of the countryside and the exploiters from the city are in interface with one another. The multitudes of the countryside are condemned to be illiterate, backward, indolent and deprived of even the basic needs of life. The exploiters from the city have access to all sorts of comforts, amenities, facilities and enjoyments. Still they are not happy, the reason for which comes forth neither from the text nor the sub-text of the poem. The irony of the whole thing is that they have no hope of the future. They presume to be held in thrall by some existentialist *angst* from which escape lies in death at the hands of the poor multitudes of the countryside:

We don't look down upon your desire,
But with full regard to you
To the existentialism you flaunt
We shall hurl you to the moon,
We are naive village-born people
With neither Apollo nor Luna at our side. (p. 20)

The above utterance forwards three other contentions which underline the poet's Naxalite view-point under overt or covert influence of the thought of Mao Tse Tung. The weapon to be used for eliminating the exploiters from the city is the spear available from archaic times in the countryside. Mao had advocated the use of archaic weapons because, to wield them from close range, they called for more initiative and will. Secondly, the American Apollo and the Russian Luna occur in close proximity in this utterance. This bears out the poet's feeling at that stage

about the American capitalist imperialism and the Soviet social imperialism being in league against the vast multitudes of the poor countries of the world. Thirdly, existentialism referred to in the utterance, seems in tune with the upper strata of society. Though the text and the sub-text ignore to mention, this is the theistic version of existentialist thought made popular for preaching the reactionary ethos. It has nothing to do with its atheistic version that Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) had, for example, developed for advancing the revolutionary cause. It was for this reason that Sartre was sympathetic towards Maoism, rather excessively in the last phase of his life. The lack of its understanding on the poet's part points to the presence of vigour and absence of refinement in the idiologemes configurating his poetry.

This vigour gathers erotic fervour and crescendo-like resonance in 'Jad Bagavat Khauldi hai'. (When revolt rages wild) Charmed by the erotic fervour that the wild feeling of revolt evokes, the interlocutor gets oblivious of annihilation lurking all around in the environments. That his self-annihilation is not to be discounted now does not bother him at all. Rather, it charms him and that too almost as a categorical imperative:

In the womb of such serene nights
When revolt rages wild,
My murder can occur in light or twilight. (p. 21)

Included in the same list is his poem 'Shardhanjli' (Compliment) in which the heathless and homeless tribals donot find archaic weapons good enough for eliminating their enemies. Since this elimination is to sound crescendo-like, so they take up guns and machine-guns *i.e.* weapons manufactured in countries professing capitalist and social imperialism respectively. The climax of his argument is reached in 'Khuli Chithi' (Open letter) in

which the interlocutor asserts without any equivocation whatsoever:

You who with bayonets are equipped,
Turn their barrels either to the foe
Or to yourself in short,
For revolution is no feast or play
Or river flowing leisurely away. (p. 54)

(2)

The poems which show how Pash outgrew the spell of the Naxalite ideology inspite of all its erotic charm and crescendo-like resonance, are of a different sort. They are of three types *i.e.* those in which the interlocutor (a) internalises all the disruption and distortion of life, (b) searches for historical antecedents to legitimise the revolt, and (c) portrays his internment, rather assassination, as essential dispensation.

The interlocutor in the first type of poems is a young male who is just past his adolescence. Though village-born, he has not suffered on his skin the miseries and rigours of life in the countryside. All the same, he has eyes which are adept now to perceive more than the stereotypes of life. So whatever he sees with his visual faculty is in total negation of what has come to him through his auditory sense. There is thus a contradiction between his observation and memory that he cannot in any way set aside.

Quite a piquant expression of it is to be found in 'Meri Maa dian Akhan' (My mother's eyes) in which the village-girl's naivety seems to him as much at fault as her maturity that bespeaks of her helpless and hapless condition. While a maiden in her village, she calls the interlocutor handsome, otherwise disfigured by perplexities. The interlocutor, who is a youngman at this stage, is not taken in by her praise. Perplexities disfiguring his mind have actually turned him cynical. So he decodes a squint in her

eye, implying thereby that she cannot see reality in the face. Years pass, the girl gets old and the interlocutor again sees her caught in a crucial situation. Driven desperate by the pranks of her son, she calls him ugly though, otherwise, she holds him so close to her heart. As before, the interlocutor encodes a squint in her eye. This decoding-encoding process convinces him of the fact that filial or fraternal and sensuous or erotic feelings have got de-enfranchised in life. To re-enfranchise them, there is the urgent need to wage a battle of ideas. This is possible only by reckoning with a great risk that metaphorically speaking is like daring the Devil in his den:

To wade through our own river of blood
To save the sun from remorse,
Burn ourselves on
Possibly for the whole night. (p. 44)

Looking reality in the face implies the grasp of all distortions which have become a part and parcel of life. In the poem 'Vela Aai Gia' (Time has come) it denotes the acceptance of all humiliations and the confession of all perversions. Amongst perversions is included marriage that takes place before the bride and bridegroom live through the interregnum of mutual liking. Such a marriage is like incest and the interlocutor is all for making a confession of it:

Time has come
For confessing, how we
To each other are bound.
To wage battle of ideas
Outside the mosquito-net,
And bear bare-faced
Shame of each other's regret. (p. 44)

There is another poem 'Visthapan' (Dissolution) of which an addict is the persona. Addiction is the way of life

that forecloses his encounter with the world. The war of ideas, courage to face reality and challenge its distortion, no longer appeal to his sense of experience. An artificial inducement keeps him in a substitute world. To break that asunder, he is required to renounce his addiction that in the poem is for opium. What happens in the wake of this renunciation is portrayed thus in the poem:

When the addict foresakes opium
He rushes into the pond at midnight,
His flesh remains scorched even in the well.
For defecation he each moment runs,
Only the foul smell of dead lion to bedevil him.
The addict resorts to smoking,
Momentary breathing to the dead lion to provide,
But how can the dead lion revive
When the addict has foresaken opium. (p. 53)

In the first instance, this renunciation cannot be the result of any initiative and will. Then, the deprivation the addict feels is excruciating for all his impulses seem to have got extinguished. There is an onerous blockage within that tends to enervate him completely. This enervation is not something to gloat over for to come to terms with it is so humiliating. For all that, his dilemma persists like constipation which not only causes physical discomfort but also induces mental enervation from which there is no escape at all. The poem is a powerful exposition of the dilemma which a person faces when the desire to shift from predicative existence to transitive living is to be realised in practice.

Wading through the labyrinth that this enervation, blockage and predicative existence entail, the interlocutor, in the second type of poems, comes to realise that resources to be drawn from the present may not be enough to dare the Devil in his den. The images of the great

personages of the past, who waged such wars at the earlier historical junctures, must be appropriated to strengthen the present struggle. In the absence of this appropriation, those masterful images are sure to be misappropriated for serving the cause of the Devil. In this way, the past must be aspired for to fight the war of the present on the side of the revolutionary forces. If any negligence is shown in this regard, there is every possibility of these masterful images faring against humanity.

For Pash the most haunting paradigm was of Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) whose valiant and all-sacrificing struggle was waged against the Mughal empire. As a warrior, hero, poet and saint, the Guru brought all sorts of resources to bear on his struggle so as to impart it past significance, present meaning and future value. In the whole of Sikh history, there was no struggle as paradigmatic as the one launched by that saint-poet-warrior. Yet moments came in the course of that struggle when all seemed lost though the Guru's belief in the Divine, that in a way was his self-confidence, did not let him feel downcast at all. The most harrowing moment for the Guru was when he had to retreat from Anandpur then under imminent seize of the Mughal forces. Feeling that all was irretrievably lost, forty of his disciples deserted him after handing over *bedawa i.e.* a letter to disown him as their Guru.

In the poem bearing this very name, Pash decodes all the lineaments of those forty disciples in the present-day Sikh leaders. To drive home his point, he refers to their hoax of consecrating the memory of the Guru's martyred sons for deriving only political mileage. He also exposes their hypocrisy to strike some deal with political bosses of all hues at the centre. Even their business deals in the name of pilgrimages to gurdwaras raised in the memory of the Guru are brought under focus. As if these references, exposures and attributing of bad faith were not enough, he

portrays them as physically ugly with the underlying presumption that only now justice is meted out to them.

As against that, he encodes the attributes of those who remained steadfast with the Guru in the Naxalite rebels who, unmindful of torture in the interrogation-centres, donot desert their cause. For Pash, the cause espoused by the Naxalite rebels shares ideologemes with the Guru's struggle. That is why the interrogative stance adopted about their identity is of exclamatory tenor. It seeks to embed the conviction that the present-day Naxalite cause continues the Guru's paradigmatic struggle for ameliorating the miserable condition of the suffering humanity. The Sikh leaders who claim to wear his mantle are renegades like those who deserted the Guru at the most crucial moment.

For all the shocking stance that this poetic strategy entails, it does not go far enough *i.e.* to the threshold of a new perspective. The reason lies in the fragmentary way in which the past is sought to be appropriated in the service of the Naxalite cause. As history has borne it out, the forty disciples who deserted the Guru at the most crucial moment, later on had a profound change of heart. When they joined their families, the women folk reprimanded them and put them to utter shame for thus deserting the Guru who had sacrificed his all for the suffering humanity. They felt so ashamed that after recanting they, under the command of a woman, Mai Bhago, rejoined the Guru in the wilderness of Malwa. All of them then laid down their lives in the battle fought against the Mughal forces. When the Guru passed by their dead bodies, one of them, who was breathing yet, begged him to tear that letter of desertion. The Guru readily did so and gave them the appellation of the forty salvaged ones.

To do justice to them and appropriate their image for strengthening the present-day struggle, the poet should

have reckoned with their whole experience. This would have made the poem more reflective and less provocative. Whether in the process it could have served the interest of the contingent cause is however difficult to surmise. Perhaps, it could not have done so that overtly because of its changed tone and tenor. This is a dilemma which remains unresolved in another poem also in which effort is made to strike figural connection between the Guru and Pash's own poetic practice. The poem under reference is 'Antika' (Epilogue) with which this maiden collection comes to a close.

In the figural connection read between the Guru and the creative persona, the first signifies not only itself but also the second while the second involves the first and brings it to the present context. Under this dispensation, the creative persona feels that his life was meant to pass in peace as of the Guru who had chosen to spend his time meditating high up at a secluded place in the Himalayas. However, that was not to be because the suffering humanity cried and groaned on the earth. The Almighty took pity and sent the Guru to ameliorate the condition of humanity stricken with pains and sufferings. At the present juncture, the bourgeois and capitalist tendencies are spreading their tentacles wide. The creative persona cannot live in solitude for these destructive tendencies do not forebode happiness to the people. He is required to shield the people even at the cost of his life:

Let us descend to the earth below
For burden of sins so awesome grows,
And here are we arrived.
Take from us our Jafarnama
In return for the dagger, our due,
The belly is ready for the stab. (p. 64)

Here, the interlocutor gets face to face with a dilemma, improbable if not impossible to resolve. To bring it into the

zone of probability, persistence is required as a way of life. In 'Yug Paltawa' (Changing the world) this persistence is to overcome all the physical affliction that is as irreducible a fact as oppression exercised by the most coercive authorities. How it's irreducibility poses arduous stakes becomes evident from the following lines:

Even with seven quilts
My shivering could not stop at midnight,
The river Satluj flowed into my bed
Wetting the seven quilts in stead,
Temperature rose to hundred six or seven
The body was drenched all over with sweat. (p. 25)

The second irreducibility results from oppression of which internment is the most singular example. Various motifs, converging on and diverging from this experience, configurate themselves in 'Khoobsoorat Pad Kandhan Jail dian' (Beautiful prison wall papers). Interned in jail, the interlocutor visualises himself either magnified to macrocosmic proportions or reduced to microcosmic entities. Sometimes it is the illusion of being a personage, like some great conqueror of the past, that charms him and at other times it is the pain of being a non-entity, powerless to do anything, that exasperates him. Either schizophrenia or xenophobia oppresses his mind. He is not able to resolve the contradiction that keeps apart these two states of his existence. That there is a horizon beyond, is his fond hope only:

Hills are there
Fields are there
Upon whose terrain
Rays and pens
Can very well cohere. (p. 24)

(3)

On their publication in book-form, these poems generated quite an interest amongst general readers and

particular literary critics. Those readers and critics who sympathised with the Naxalite upsurge, looked upon this book as a boon for Punjabi poetry. Several arguments were there which they forwarded to affirm this point. One was that it was real poetry hitting the nail upon the head. This sort of general admiration came from those who were only interested in the writing or reading of poetry. Those who were equipped with ideological intention maintained that for the first time this poetry had uncovered class-conflict latently operating in the life around. Thirdly, this book was acclaimed for the incentive it gave to readers to become actual fighters for the proletarian cause on the side of the downtrodden people.

On the other side were arguments which aimed at reviling this book and by implication the poetic practice it represented. Those readers and critics who were nurtured upon the English poetry of T.S. Eliot and called themselves advocates of experimentalism, condemned Pash's book for its crescendo-like fervour. Since it does no behove a modern man to articulate his militant outlook, so by doing this Pash seemed to them masquerading like a false prophet. Another argument advanced was that excessive employment of political content made it impure as against pure poetry that should be the forte. This was a view that came from those who under the influence of formalism, sought to plead for aesthetic quality.

Readers and critics affiliated with the established communist ideology, also came up with adverse judgement. They indicted Pash for his class-character that they found was of a petty-bourgeois adventurist. Unmindful of the actual historical situation that did not warrant armed struggle, he was advancing the cause of violence. This was voluntarism of the type that could not contribute anything beyond placating the ego. Another side of the argument was that the revolutionary fervour with which this poetry

overflowed was of the romantic sort employing extremism as a shadow-play only.

Embedded with a sense of immediacy, these polarised views were un-nuanced and unelaborated. Likewise were two impressionistic observations which Prof. Sant Singh Sekhon (1908-1997) and Dr. Harbhajan Singh (1921), the two most celebrated litterateurs of Punjabi, were impelled to make about this poetry. In Sant Singh Sekhon's view, Pash, on the score of his poetry and the power it displayed, had arrived or nearly arrived on the national scene. His other observation was that after Mohan Singh and Shiv Kumar, it was Pash who had not only formed but also popularised a poetic style. Dr. Haribhajan Singh's observation was in the form of a versified composition in which he wondered whether poetic practice of the sort was really a genuine one:

What sort of poetry is it, o friends,
That grows from the barrel of a gun?

No doubt, in feeling, tone and tenor, this interrogative utterance of Dr. Harbhajan Singh went against the grain of Sant Singh Sekhon's second observation.

How Pash rated all these views is nowhere stated by him in explicit terms. Implicitly, he grappled with them all and tried to get across them in poetic terms. This becomes more than evident from his second collection of poems. In every sense of the word, it is a qualitative leap beyond his maiden attempt.

4

Udhde Baajan Magar

Udhde Baajan Magar 1974 (In Pursuit of Flying Eagles) was Pash's second collection of poems. These poems show how his poetic practice tended to articulate feelings of prospective revolution. To remain trapped in immediate insurrection was no longer on its agenda. Two reasons were there which sought to catalyse and crystallise this project. First was his internment in the course of which Pash suffered physical torture along with mental agony, too acute to be put into words. It goes to his credit however that he did not take it just as trauma *i.e.* a curse befallen all of a sudden emotionally to displace and ineffectually to dislocate him. He encountered it as drama that came his way for gathering awareness of life even under the worst circumstances. Second, after his release he took to the study of Leon Trotsky, a profound though heretic ideologue of Marxism. A votary of permanent revolution though, he believed in the relative autonomy of culture, literature, philosophy and language. This study helped Pash to redefine the nature and role of revolutionary poetry, its poetics and practice.

The opening poem carrying the name of the collection pleads for a revolutionary elan. It synchronises with Trotsky's concept of permanent or ongoing revolution in all spheres of life. To be its vehicle, the interlocutor renegotiates pursuit of eagles as the leitmotif of the poem. This is poetically and ideologically a very apt thing to do. In the folklore, the eagle in flight is believed to persist till it strikes the centre of the sun. In the poem, the eagles are several in number, implying thereby that this project has to be a multiplex one. It has to take a leap from the poetic moment meant to be innovative in practice. It must

dispense with traditional literary tropes and conventions which otherwise draw admiration from orthodox critics reminding of "red professors" in Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*, (p. 95) The urgency, the interlocutor brings to bear upon this dispensation, becomes evident from the following lines in the beginning of the poem:

Eagles have flown aloft taking in their beaks
Our desire for a moment's life of peace,
Friends, let us indeed,
In pursuit of flying eagles proceed. (p. 5)

To get on with this pursuit, the interlocutor has a strong urge to dispense with all other factors which may restrict and constrict his initiative and will. What to talk of family-ties and political compulsions, even ideological blockages are to be dispensed with without any regret or rancour. All this is essential to do otherwise the routine so overtakes a person that even his unconscious gives way to these variegated restrictions and constrictions. In that case, the dreams lose all their intractable charm and sheer enervation becomes the order of life:

In this dungeon of life
When your voice to yourself returns,
Dreams like old ox's unstruck neck
In rankling eyes burn,
And the dirt of streets sticks
To life's most beautiful years.
Then the best thing to do
Friends, is indeed,
In pursuit of flying eagles to proceed. (p. 7)

(1)

For realising this project, there is the urgent need to forge an on-going nexus between theory and practice. The urge to do so acquires powerful articulation in the poem

'Hath' (Hands) that visualises limbs as more than physical. They are the mode of physical labour, social contract and political activity:

Hands are not there for menial work only
They can also be there for exploiters to smash.
Those who violate the religion of hands
Those who insult their aesthetics
They are with paralysis stricken,
For hands are meant to provide support
They are meant assent to report. (p. 24)

This poem is the culmination of several others in which Pash has sought to unravel the jail experience, the deprivation it subjects the prisoner to and the overt and covert violence it perpetrates upon his body and mind. In his perception the prisoner becomes the terrain for a war of attrition waged between rigorous regulations which the authorities imprisoning him want the prisoner to observe and his impulses which rebel against their cruelty and violence.

'Jail' (Jail) records the illusion that the authorities nurture in their bid to deprive him of his natural impulses. They want him to drop from his mind and memory the moments when he went about like the elements of nature. To feel deprived of his elementary and elemental living, is what the authorities want him to get obsessed with. However, this betokens a surrender the very idea of which is so repugnant to the interlocutor. To keep his identity intact, the prisoner redefines his relationship afresh with random objects of nature. Their observation helps him to keep his impulses wholesome at the same time that they re-negotiate his priorities. As 'Aasmaan da Tukra' (Piece of the sky) so succintly brings out, they by themselves form his most cherished and cherishable constituency. Against all deprivation, they ensure the feeling of abundance so essential to sustain him:

What you term my nothing
Itself carries your death's weapon;
I have a lot with me
In that nothing be very many things. (p. 13)

That way, this tiny portion of the sky become visible through the ventilator, is his valuable possession worthy of all veneration. It is quite the opposite of what as a source of inquietude quarter of moon and fistful of stars forming such a portion of the sky becomes for Amrita Pritam (1919-) in a poem included in her collection *Lamian Watan* (Interminable Journeys). The chamleon-like cantours it acquires from moment to moment donot let the prisoner petrify this portion into a totem. With no end to its intractable image lurking before the prisoner's eyes, it seems to configure all the vastness of the sky:

Why don't they ask it then to petrify . . .
And discard from its body
The shades of all the seasons,
This portion, that on its shoulders,
Carries the whole sky. (p. 13)

'Janam Din' (Birth-day) has another motif to play upon as a musical variation. This day that in the world outside could be the occasion of material gifts carries no such aura for the prisoner behind the bars. For him it is only the occasion to realise how his life, that so far grew as years in chronological order, is now faced with a rupture. No wonder, it is a climatic moment for self-realisation *i.e.*, to set agenda for authentic living without which celebration is altogether an inane affair.

In 'Dan' (Bounty) the imprisoned interlocutor expresses his resolve to cultivate aptitudes going against the grain of those which the authorities want him to inculcate in jail. To show himself as a miserable and pitiable creature, the authorities require of him to weep

over his separation from home, lament over the loss of his beloved and sink in the labyrinth of despair. Defying them on all these scores, he assumes a posture for which these pitying gestures and pitiable gesticulations are completely alien. The worst thing the authorities can do to him is to cause his death that paradoxically speaking would be a self-defeating tactic, ironically termed bounty by the prisoner. After that, their claim to hold him in prison will vanish into thin air.

In 'Asavikar' (Unacceptable), the interlocutor feels that the time spent in jail is only an interlude that he will set aside while taking a true measure of his life. He goes to the extent of calling it a period that he has already excluded from the span yet in store for him. He hopes to chalk out a more authentic design of his life on the basis of what he will learn from his stay in jail. The time spent in jail has only chronological transparency while its counterpart to be lived in authentic design bears profound experiential significance. To hold it as a rich recompense for the corroding time, there figures the spatial metaphor of the room versus the house in the last lines of the poem. It is capable enough as to couch this irrefragable view into a plastic experience:

Like rust marking the boat
You can corrode my body,
But what will you do to the journey
That cares for what to it is entrusted?
What will you do to the winds
Which, somewhere their account to give,
Blow over the room's debris here? (p. 19)

In 'Safar' (Journey) the interlocutor's irrefragability gets further strengthened. Now the span beyond the period to pass in jail seems a stage on the interminable journey of life. All regrets for having missed moments of love are of no consequence when compared in retrospect

or prospect with this on-going journey. Of course, a persistent effort is required to turn this realisation into conviction. Feeling that all this is within the scope of human achievement, the prisoner does not feel like brooding over his loss:

From where this journey begins
How many colours raised dust reflects
Such questions and several scores more
You may ask from Plato of yore,
For I am just a brute traveller
Who has only this to say:
No word stands for farewell
Journey is no tale of pain
Death is no half-way stop
And destined is not the end at all. (p. 21)

It is in the semiotic mode that Pash has written these poems on jail-experience. That way, they are an exception on two counts at least. First, hardly as such in Punjabi any worthwhile poetry is available on jail-experience. Of course several poets, particularly in the pre-Independence era, had spent years behind the bars. They had composed verses during their internment. In their desire to upgrade patriotism, nationalism and struggle for independence, they had bypassed jail experience, its rigour and brutality.

Urdu, with a lot of linguistic consanguinity with Punjabi, claims much poetry and some of very high quality on jail-experience itself. The ghazals of Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984) available in his collection *Jinda Nama* (Saga of Living) are worthy of special mention in this regard. Written in the symbolic mode, they however tend to take a leap from jail-experience for deeper dialogue with Ghalib or some other master.

The figural connection, that links Ghalib's motifs with their counterparts in Faiz, underlines the urgency of union

with the beloved. As a result, Faiz's ghazals acquire semantic richness for which jail-experience is as counter-point in musical notation. Pash's poems, written in the semiotic mode, privilege for themselves no such deeper moment. The semantic richness that accrues to Faiz's ghazals in the symbolic mode slips by their mimetic mode. For all that, they acquire immanent lucidity adequate enough to uncover the rigours of the jail-experience. That this immanent lucidity negotiates no relief through revolutionary practice is however a different matter.

(2)

In this collection, another category is of love poems. In common parlance, love poems are believed to overflow with joy if the lovers have attained to their destined union. Whatever comes in the way of this destined union, invites their inveterate hostility. If separation is their irrevocable destiny, the lovers are expected to pour out their sadness and despair so as to distinguish them from the ordinary range of men and women. Their uniqueness rests in the fact that the joy of union is such as holds in contempt all the privations of the world. Correspondingly, such is the pain of separation that no worldly comfort can compensate for it.

Usually in love-poems, the addressor reckons with the addressee in such a way that the monologic address has to go without dialogic response, howsoever willed it is from the beginning itself. Such was the leitmotif of love-poetry that Mohan Singh and Amrita Pritam on one hand and Shiv Batalvi and Dr. Harbhajan Singh on the other had then written in Punjabi. Of course, this common leitmotif in each case generated varying and varied motifs of the secondary and tertiary sort. For all that, love-poetry written in Punjabi around the time that Pash appeared on the scene, wore such a recognisable identity.

In Pash's poetic output, love-poems are only a few in number. In spite of that, they hold out the promise of love-poetry's generic re-orientation in Punjabi. In this regard, best to hold attention is 'Ohde Naan' (In her name) the like of which has hardly been written after that by any other poet. In the poem, the addressor, configurating himself in the first person singular, is a revolutionary poet. His beloved is a village-girl who nurtures fond feelings for him through embroidery in which she busies herself all the time. This motif is drawn from folk-songs where it illustrates the bride's readiness to be married to the bridegroom of her parent's choice. In the poem, it stands for the awareness growing in the countryside to take destiny in its own hands and reconstitute life according to its own initiative and will. However, this growing awareness is in for debacle in the form of the poet's arrest which not only drags him away from her presence but also leaves a shadow on her fond feelings for him:

My adoration, my integrity are doubly hurt
Hurt is your laughter as of linseed flowers;
They take me away, the enemies of your happiness,
Leaving behind the handcuff's shameless rattle. (p. 42)

His arrest perpetrates grave injustice upon her virginal pleasure that, drawing sustenance from the natural scenery and agricultural scenario, bespeaks of the self-sufficiency of the village-life. It is this self-sufficiency couched in a feeling of devotional intimacy that impels the poet fervently to bow at his beloved's door. So far the prison-gate goes, it draws only his deep-rooted derision:

It is on your door only that my head bows
Time and again I deride the prison-gate,
Only in my village do I live effaced
But defy rulers with relentless resolve. (p. 42)

In the prison, he gets more aware of exploitation to which the countryside is subjected. For him the exploiting agency is not just the State as earlier he might have heaped contempt upon it and that too in a singular way. Now it is the entire system that holds the countryside to ransom. Employing both the disciplining and punishing mode, the system holds in thrall all the overt and covert aspects of this life. Both in his view of the exploiting agency and the range of exploitation, Pash goes beyond the monolithic view that he had formed of them earlier. The subtlety that in his later poetry comes his way in visualising their power-play and zone of contention remains as yet beyond his imaginative grasp.

There are several other poems which seek to uncover and subvert motifs popular with love poets in Punjabi. In 'Udeek' (Waiting) the interlocutor disputes the fact that nature can ever remain a source of warmth and comfort as love-poetry has held without any contention to the contrary. No wonder, it draws metaphors from nature in abundance so as to project this contention as conviction. Instead, Pash seems to contend that to decrease the rigour of life's bitterness, it may perhaps be more desirable to rely on human initiative and will. Indulgence in nature may not become a viable criterion for them. That its viability is all the more fragile, becomes amply evident from the following metonymic expression:

It may not be essential then
To burn the inner self with smoking;
The shame of roaming may be less
The helplessness of pain may go.

It may not be so arduous to erase
Errors from the page of life,
May be the compulsion vanishes
Of smouldering away in shame,
And there may not remain then
The shame of claiming one's face. (p. 49)

'Bas Kujh Pal Hor' (A few moments more) takes rather a fatalistic view of love. Mutual fascination and colourful aura, usually recalled in love-poetry, seem to Pash as of very transitory nature. Ultimately, it is their apocalyptic ending that awaits them. 'Tere Kol' (To you) poses a challenging stance to all this coming to nought. The interlocutor as a male lover challenges his beloved to grow so as to be worthy of his complaint. The poem, covertly though, disputes the image of the beloved that love-poetry has so far projected. This image has played only upon her physical beauty by glorifying her attributes through metaphorical expression. If any aspect of her mind is invoked, it is only innocence as a correlative of her physical beauty. Of course, Pash does not invoke the attributes of the mind which the beloved should cultivate to get across his complaint. That he has in mind some different attributes is what the following lines, herald in no uncertain terms:

To disclose to you the true heart
Is to pour insult on it,
Is to profane the truth,
To complain is to humiliate love;
Go and get worthy of complaint,
So far your stature is too short
My complaint to face. (p. 52)

Lastly, there is a small poem, 'Kall Noo' (Tomorrow), that reminds of W.H. Auden (1907-1973) in whose playful lyric the beloved in the manner of a mistress is invited to cohabit with her faithless paramour. It is the sheer artificiality of the traditional image of the beloved that provokes Pash to come up with this subversive image:

Truth, o loving one,
Burns on my tongue,
With a bit of lie support me
So that I make love to thee. (p. 51)

At the same time, he has the vague premonition that such a casual union can never be the basis of a lasting human relationship.

(3)

The collection has several political poems written in polemical style. Two of them are direct addresses, one to the policeman and the other to Ahmad Salim, a Pakistani poet writing in Punjabi. The poem 'Pulis de Sipahi noon' (To the policeman) exhorts this low-paid government employee to cast away his falsely assumed role of being the custodian of peace in the country. Instead, he should become aware of his real class-character and cultivate commensurate social awareness. To drive home his point, the interlocutor talks of all the privations which he suffers like so many of his countrymen. But for a few Brechtian observations, the poem remains exhortatory written in a polemical rather than poetic mode. The following is, of course, an observation of the Brechtian sort:

We now hold a danger only to those
Who face nothing but danger in life. (p. 67)

'Ahmad Salim de Naam' (In Ahmad Salim's name) is also a polemical and exhortatory composition. At the time of Bangladesh's uprising against Pakistan, Ahmad Salim sided with those who had revolted against the country of his birth. That way, he gave evidence of moral courage and human sympathy which most of the Pakistani intellectuals had lacked at that historical juncture. Giving him his due, Pash thinks that writers and poets of his integrity are expected more than to make national and anti-occupationist stand as the arbiter of their convictions. For that, they should affirm solidarity with the vast multitudes of poor people everywhere in the world. But for certain Brechtian observations, the poem again remains polemical and exhortatory. The following lines comprise an exception to the poem's general flow:

Let us exhort stomachs against heads to fight,
Become bodies in full to fight against their plight;
For war-mongering we shall sentence them then,
Now is the occasion only for your bodies to fight. (p. 41)

There are other three poems in which political content seems to have been articulated in a poetic way. They provide deep insight into the fate of the starving countrymen, miseries they are further subject to on account of rampant corruption, internicine warfare, democratic facade, and fatalism sanctioning their creaturely existence. 'Mera Desh' (My country) brings all these unpalatable facts into focus in a cumulative way. With its realistic cantours, this image of the country uncovers all that under patriotic fervour, political poetry sought to exclude from literary expression. Though in the first person plural, the interlocutor's being seems plastic enough so as to impart urgency to his insight.

However, the perversion that the political system has undergone, attains quite a disturbing expression in 'Censor hon Wale Khat da Dukhant' (Tragedy of a letter to be censored), a poem remarkable for its bitter but controlled expression. The interlocutor draws his beloved's attention to the perverse meanings which the policeman, censoring her letter addressed to him in jail, will draw from her innocent mention of things engaging and worrying her in day-today life. Her complaint about not having met for long will be construed as her comment upon the system getting worn out at the seams. Likewise, her sorrow over time gone awry will be taken as her mourning over the death of those killed in police-firing. Strategic and sinister meanings will be read in her offended mention of price-rise and sorrowful remembrance of her brother killed in Bangladesh. In the last instance, the censoring policeman will go to the extent of imputing to her even anti-national motives:

In your wail of price-rise he will detect
A sign of change in revolutionary tactic,
In your mourning over your brother
Killed in Bangladesh will he discern
Espionage for the Chinese regime;
You little know what will happen
When so much perversion ensues,
When on the obscurantist palm
Your letter so writhes in pain. (p. 71)

The subdued tone in which this perversion is described sends a shiver down the reader's spine. That the person incharge does all this mechanically without any spontaneous urge or voluntaristic design shows in all its graphic bareness, the sinister operation of the system itself. Rather than a generative and regenerative organism, the system has declined into a disciplining and punishing machanism without any rational kernel whatsoever. In the process, the subaltern people have been so appropriated that their proletarian impulse has got completely obliterated. Without getting anti revolutionary, Pash here pinpoints the bitter actuality of the system gone astray, become topsy-turvy so as to subvert its own constituency *i.e.* the people.

'Roj hi ese tran hunda hai' (This is what it daily happens) describes how the rhythm of life, beginning on a note of expectation and fecundity, has its ending in utter ennui and aridity. Life's passage through the middle stage of labour and exhaustion does not signal any alternative dispensation. The motif of expectation and fecundity is evoked through the picture of the earth pulsating like a virgin whom the onrush of the menses transports to a region of desire and wonder. So impelling gets the scenario around, that the smoke arising from hearths traces a scene that compares in loveliness with the interior landscape of the mind.

All this begins to flounder because the criss-cross that eventually gets traced is onerous like load the women going to and coming from fields carry on their heads. It leaves a botched feeling of blockage and confusion for which images, drawing upon brooding oxen with fodder stuffed in the mouths, the hen with a grain stuffed in its throat and dogs with desire dying in their eyes, seem very apt indeed. Best conveyed through animal and bird images, this sort of living is not of the non-human world only. It is more specific to the human world. To underline this insight the poem ends on this bitter but remorseful note:

Each day floats in the gums of the oxen
Shrunken taste of the stalks of fodder,
As a hen died of epidemic spread
Has a grain stuck in the throat.
Daily hope dies in the dog's eyes
Daily in the peasant's belly and of his dog
The longing for the last morsel arises,
This is what does daily happen. (pp. 73-74)

There is no stopping at this blotched and blocked stage. After all, a more hopeless and hapless change is yet to happen in the form of everything ending in ennui and aridity. To convey this pitiable stage, two gender-specific images are employed. The first is of virgins whose erotic desires smoulder into nothingness for sexual fulfilment is a taboo strictly embedded in their minds. The second is of old persons who on the one hand can only brood over lice in their palsied heads and on the other are too forgetful to recite the scriptures which for years they have reposed in their minds. All these are not exceptional phenomena to happen at rare moments in history. They are so common that to convey their commonness, Pash has resorted to this culinary image:

Daily to me all this seems
Like roasted chicken
That will now be served
For the chair to eat. (p. 74)

The collection reaches its culmination in the penultimate poem. Entitled 'Kande da Jakham' (The wound of the thorn), it focuses upon the life-long routine of an anonymous villager. Standing for subaltern humanity, he has hardly exercised his initiative and will to improve his creaturely existence. With quasi-deaf ears and half-closed eyes, he has daily trudged from thatched hut to his field at sun-rise and on the same path back again at sunset. This routine has never grown into experience so as to enable him to attain wisdom that is believed to be the epic side of truth. In other words, his biological birth has stayed at the threshold from beyond which extends the vast range of cultural rebirth. With no new illuminations to shed and renewed perspectives to provide, his life has gone on as of a creaturely being:

The way from his thatched hut
Still leads to the well,
In his foot-print lost
Under millions of others,
Laughs yet the wound of the thorn,
Laughs yet the wound of the thorn. (pp. 76-77)

This poem is remarkable for allegorising the fate of the peasantry. Equally remarkable is it for hearkening Pash's poetic practice to comparative projection. At this juncture, his over-arching ambition was to write poetry from below much in the way Pablo Neruda (1901-1973) with his all-pervasive empathy with the Latin American people was writing in the Spanish language. Around this time, he read with avid interest two volumes of Neruda's poetry. They were *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* and

Extravaganza respectively. He was so much moved on reading them that he failed to find words to record his excitement. In faltering tone, he wrote in a letter, "These books have for the first time made me realise the nature of poetry and the range of its effect. By revealing the inner recesses of death, darkness, silence and beauty, they have confirmed my faith in living." Carrying on with his impression, he wrote further, "Here is a poet who, beyond nails and fingers has arms and those too extending vastly to the sky. He is a poet who exercises on my mind not only pleasure but persuasion as well." (*Chithian*, p. 40)

Eager to write like Neurda but without any wish to copy him, Pash sought to permeate his poetic practice with the materiality of ordinary objects, their random impurity, flawed and fraught signification and staggering gesturation so representative of Neruda's poetry. The result was this poem of Pash reminding of Neruda's two poems 'To the Dead Poor Man' and 'The People' which in the Latin-American context also deal with the creaturely existence of the peasantry. In the first poem, the central character is dead and the narrator is also the observer of the event. His observation confirms the fact that continuous deprivation meant continual death of that poor person. This was an outrage of which social system and religious ethos were equally guilty. The system deprived him of all comforts and religion held out the false hope that he would get them in far greater measure in the life to come after death.

In the second poem, this issue gets more pervasive both in retrospect and prospect. There arises from the memory of the poet the image of a man whom he had seen two centuries back starving and going in search of food from place to place. Rather than a person, he is a persona representing the starving peasantry in time and space. Nothing *i.e.* ancestory, inheritance and property has held out any hope for him. The actual thing was his starvation

only that underlined his permanent insecurity. Thus the poem reckons not only with economic growth, social justice and political change but also with literary practice and cultural memory, etc.

In Pash's poem, the creaturely peasant lives anonymously in his native village. His life-long career is confined only to corporeal labour. There is hardly anything else to distinguish him. No conflict between the mind and the body, the social and the sexual, the objective and the subjective, is reserved for him. His ears have registered three sounds only:

One was the crowing of the cock,
The other was the muffling of animals,
And the third was of morsel chewed. (p. 75)

Likewise, his eyes never cast alluring look on the skyscape above or the landscape around:

All his life he knew three hues only:
One was the hue of the earth
That he could not take to even once,
The other was the hue of the sky
That bore several names
But none came easy to him,
The last was the hue of his wife's cheeks
That in modesty he named not all his life. (p. 76)

Thus the creaturely peasant stuck only to one place. Atrophied to his vegetative existence in Pash, he has elements like and unlike those of the personae in Neruda. For all that, he does not become their shadow. His cultural specificity remains intact to show how Pash imbibed Neruda's influence in a creative rather than imitative way. At this juncture thus, Pash's poetic practice hearkened to comparative projection, again to distinguish him from other Punjabi poets of the era.

5

Saade Samian Vich

Pash did not rest content even with that much achievement. In his epilogue to the second collection, he felt distraught with what he had so far written as poetry. Paradoxically terming it as 'Jithe kavita khatam hundi hai' (Where poetry comes to end), he sought to convey the feeling that the motifs so far evoked, tended to block his poetic practice. To enable it to flourish further, there was the dire need to enrich his subject-matter. In his third collection that was the last to come out during his life-time, Pash not only extended the range of his motifs but also explored them with more dexterity and profundity. No wonder, the renewed subject-matter came up with far original truth-content. In this regard his originality did not denote only his urge to be different in the metaphorical sense. In the etymological sense, it also connoted his effort to explore experiences, relationships, feelings and values to their roots or origins. So all structures and institutions ranging from politics to religion and kinship to nationalism, came under his purview. Taking under their ambience, ideology, economy, marriage and power immanent in them all, he drew from them motifs for his poetic practice. As a result, the collection has become remarkable not only for its poetic significance but for its cultural meaning as well.

In this regard, it is very essential to ponder over his renewed view about commitment. The singular sense of the political that in the beginning it had carried, was no longer adequate for his purpose. Dispensing with its overtly political denotation, he came up with its cultural connotation. The following lines from the poem 'Pratibadhta' (Commitment) clearly show his renewed perception:

As the sun, the wind and the cloud
Remain close to us in houses and fields,
Likewise, we want to have
Of polity, belief and joy,
A feel close to our lives. (p. 10)

Surpassing the meaning which commitment had gathered under the prevalent influence of dominant versions of the communist ideology, Pash visualised it as alignment. For alignment human beings are constituted by heritage, kinship, social and physical environment, mode of teaching and learning, political system and religious and ideological orientation. Along with, alignment visualises them as beings reconstituting themselves through the exercise of hegemony vis-a-vis their relationships with themselves, society and nature. There is thus a double disposition that an aligned poet brings to bear upon marital, political, religious and ideological issues. Only through this double disposition is possible their reflection or refraction and mimesis or signification in poetry.

In the beginning of the collection, are three poems which in the light of his renewed realisation define and redefine his poetic agenda. No wonder, they are written in a mode that is polemical and reflective at the same moment. The first 'Inkar' (Refusal) rejects the attitude of equating backwardness, illiteracy and crudity with simplicity, innocence and goodness. Appearing as epilogue, this poem shows how Pash had discarded his earlier attitude of invariably upholding the village-life over the city-life. Intent upon reckoning with what is worth-while in development and growth, he, in the next poem, 'Jithe kavita khatam nahin hundi, (Where poetry doesn't end) reflects upon the gains of education, modernisation and role of media in disseminating new awareness. In the process, the interlocutor does not become their reprint because he begins to visualise alternative modes for

ameliorating life. At the same time, he remains sceptic of their efficacy and veracity:

Like sharp needles, dark letters pierced my body
Who like a rabbit, hid in the bushes.
Chased by exam's hunting dogs
I was startled to find
That East and West are here in the abstract,
With nothing rising or setting;
God doesn't come eavesdropping at night
To put sugar in melons to sweeten,
He also doesn't come to burst our cotton-balls
Like a fledgling opening its mouth for grain. (p. 2)

Evidently, these alternative modes don't set aside his alignment; they only enrich it for deeper grasp of reality. The next poem 'Main hun vida hunda haan' (Now I take leave of you) holds a mirror to all this by underlining his desire for living that no repression from within and oppression from without should be able to set aside. In face of anything to the contrary, he has only this wish to fulfil:

To blossom like sun-light on the earth
And then shrink in sudden embrace,
To explode like gun-powder
And resound on the four sides,
That, my love, is the art of living.
To live and love they will never know
Whom life has turned into stingy beings. (p. 8)

This is to guarantee liberation both in being and becoming through creative role of structures and institutions. Nothing residual like tradition, religion, and ritualism or dominant like politics, power and ideology, should acquire a manipulative control over life. The subsequent poem 'Pratibadhta' to which reference has already been made, reiterates his position further:

To taste something bitter in tear-gas
Or one's own blood on the tongue to taste,
I have pleasure for none;
For we don't want anything formal,
We want everything actual
Life, socialism and what not . . . (p. 10)

(1)

In this regard the first cycle to come to mind comprises poems in which power is shown contaminating man-woman relationship in a rather barbarous a way. As a result, all beautiful feelings, nostalgic memories and elevating rituals associated with it come to nought. 'Chirian da Chamba' (Flock of sparrows) exposes how female desire for union with the male, remains blocked in the pre-marital stage. All the smiles, glances, complaints, embraces and swoonings which are meant to adorn this union vanish into thin air. The folk-songs which record these motifs in words more gestural than semantic, prove hollow of purpose and devoid of promise. The actual life in which scarcity is deeply embedded shatters the village maidens altogether. As a result, their living ends up as interminable monotony from which no reprieve or respite is possible:

Flock of sparrows will not take flight
For some far, far-off land,
Will always suffer the fodder's itch,
Spot of menses on white sheet
Will mock it all its life. (p. 20)

There are two other poems which show how all the pleasures which the marital union promises, turn topsy-turvy when brutal and bare power determines its inception, consummation and perpetuation. With countless blessings from parents, relatives and friends, the bride takes leave of the natal home to accompany the

bridegroom to the house of her in-laws. The dowry she takes alongwith is important both for its material gain and signifying value. All the motifs embellishing it were embroidered by her with erotic charm and loving care. Immediately after arrival in the house of her in-laws, she is faced with an alien situation. Her life in the native village does not hold any brief for this sudden transition that is as traumatic as landing in an alien country. The poem 'Hai taan bara Ajib' (Strange does it seem) describes this transition in words which are both graphic and metaphorical:

So strange is it to reject actual hands
For the transitory henna-glow,
Or to weave into your breath
The dumb silence of fairs dispersed,
Or to bring to mind the measures
So many times trampled in the ploughed fields. (pp. 51-52)

This deprivation that accrues to the signification of all items of her dowry and blessings from her parents is not incidental. Nor does it happen on a few occasions only. Instead, it is a part and parcel of routine interminably shadowing her whole life. As a result, the remembrance of things past does not bring any reprieve. Reprimands and reproofs, censures and rebukes get frequent, albeit continual, if not continuous for that matter. Not stopping at that, thrashing by the husband becomes a daily routine. 'Aashik di Ahinsa' (Lover's passivity) provides ample excuses for its unmitigated occurence:

The issue is not the first born son only
It is of the maiden kiss as well
Or of a single full-fledged look.
It was always the lover
Whose presence was resented,
The husband has only staff in hand
Or a leg-blow with the boot along. (p. 33)

There are two other poems which, though not included in the collection, project this dilemma from the angle of an intimate observer if not the actual recipient. This observer is the brother of the bride. The brother and sister have grown up together and relish very fond memories of their childhood. After the sister's marriage, he is as desiring to visit her as she is to welcome him as if in an alien country. For all his ardent desire, he is reluctant to go for fear that the hospitality the sister is certain to shower will cause her trouble in the in-law's house. Added to this folkloric motif is another one that bespeaks of Pash's ideological stance. The brother's reluctance to go has an economic factor behind it. Afterall, he does not have the resources to carry presents for her. All the meagre resources which he had have been sacrificed at the altar of her marriage. In 'Ghaa waang char gia banda' (A person like grass grazed) the brother expresses his inability to visit her because the camel upon which he is to ride, has grazed away his identity. In the companion piece 'Baihna da geet' (Sister's song) he draws a bleak prospect of his life. The expenses upon her marriage have brought him under doldrums. Now he may have to remain single all his life. That is not only humiliating but also demeaning to do in a culture where top priority is awarded to perpetuating the family-line.

These poems foreground the tension between folklore and ideology that is immanent in the poetry of Pash. Folklore, without any exception, is the archive of the people's commonsense. All that the people, getting across ethnic, religious, social, economic and political differences, have believed in common, is preserved in the folklore of which the female in the first and the male in the second instance is the interlocutor. No wonder, all that they have felt and believed about birth, marriage and death is preserved in folk-songs. They are composed in language that is gestural, idiomatic and proverbial. Rather than

elaboration, critique and coherence, brevity, gesturation and gesticulation comprise their compositional principle. This is because all that is bodily in experience, sensuous in perception and generic in belief, forms their ethos. They have anthropomorphic and anthropocentric ethos running through them. Instead of innovation, renewal and revolution, folklore conveys the message of sustenance, perseverance and reliance, only.

This message conflicts with what Pash learnt from ideology that, beginning with its elementary form drawn from Maoism, passed through its innovative phase under Trotsky's impact, finally to enter into its productive phase of cultural immanence. As evidence of this conflict, these poems take up specific motifs from the folklore. The female belief about marriage as a good-bye to all that formed their complex of pleasure, affection and comfort in the parental house is foremost among them. Instead of reiterating and re-affirming them, Pash uncovers the patriarchal power that animates them and now under the burden of economic privations, social compulsions and cultural stereotypes, has started contaminating life itself. In place of becoming a vehicle of cathartic pleasure, these poems of Pash convey a feeling of shock so as to draw attention to the enervation that is in store for not only the folkloric experience but also the residual value-system that its ethos holds forth for the people.

(2)

There are two poems deriving from legendary and historical sources which deal with the debacle that erotic love and divine sacrifice, so much embedded in Punjabi ethos, are faced with at the modern historical juncture. 'Kalam Mirza' (Mirza's utterance) takes its leap not from the climatic moment at the end but from the crucial stage at the legend's beginning or even prior to that. In the legend, the climatic moment comes when Mirza, having

eloped with Sahiban on his mare that symbolises his elementary ethos, stops halfway to have sound sleep presumably after passionate mating, under a wild tree. Feeling that the heroic but reckless Mirza would shoot her brothers dead if in pursuit they came over there which they were destined to do, Sahiban hangs his quiver of arrows in the tree's branches. The pursuers arrive on the scene, slay him to wreak vangeance for abducting the daughter of the family and drag her away to their house, by implication to the conventional way of living. According to the legend, Sahiban's actual abduction happens now when she is forcibly re-appropriated into the convention-ridden social set-up. Her earlier elopement with Mirza was something admirable for it was meant to assert erotic love as the criterion for marriage.

Pash begins his poem at the stage when Mirza has not yet felt the drive of eros. So the challenging task before him is not to elope with Sahiban so as to secure her from social abduction. The issue before him is to save himself from the abduction that the social system through economic constraints and social restraints has in store for him. What to talk of the educational apparatus, everything, including poetic practice that is believed to be subversive by nature, operates to actualise his abduction:

It is the tide of time only
That you won't betray me
And I shall die before my brother's eyes.
That is why I say
Everything will not happen as before:
Your eye, they say, does not bear collacium
Your hair, they say, slips from the comb. (p. 44)

For Pash thus, erotic love so much celebrated in the popular ethos gets re-appropriated into social compliance. The rebellious stance that the legendary characters took to

uphold it's efficacy and veracity, is no longer a fact of life. Whether heroic death under religious fervour is efficacious and veritable is, the issue of the other poem 'Joga Singh di Swai-Prachol' (Joga Singh's self-analysis) that draws it's subject-matter from history. As the story goes, Joga Singh was an ardent disciple of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last apostle of Sikhism and the saviour of its followers from the Mughal oppression. When Joga Singh's marriage-ceremony was in the process of being solemnised, he received an urgent call from the Guru to proceed at once to the battlefield of Bhangani. The Guru was locked in a battle with the rajas of the hill-states and being outnumbered, he was in dire need of his support. By the time the call came, three *lavan* (marriage songs) had been recited for the bride and the bridegroom to imbibe their message. The recitation of the fourth *i.e.* the final marriage-song was going on when the call reached at that crucial moment. Rather than wait for the final marriage-song to complete, Joga Singh left the ceremony in between and on his horse proceeded at once to the battlefield of Bhangani.

The poem under consideration begins when he is on his way to the battlefield at the call of the Guru. He is a disciple of the Guru but for authentic articulation of his identity at the modern historical juncture, he is required to mark a difference from his figural self. Pash has candidly put it so in a letter:

He is a Sikh of a new orientation. The Guru oriented him in a way of his own, but when he glanced at him after that, he found his orientation altogether a different one. So this Joga Singh so intent on taking part in battle is not a mercenary soldier and as a result warfare is not a singularly total ideal with him. Now as well, he will wage a war but only under obligation to be perfect. Within him lurks the urge to live in harmony with the world as the final marriage-song calls upon him to do, but at the same time, he has got doubtful of its veracity." (*Chithian*, p. 192).

It is while grappling with this sense of identity that the interlocutor goes on his way. Sometimes, he feels that his ardent faith in the Guru has delivered him from all his conflicts, doubts, fears and terrors. It is this state of transfiguration that he gives expression to in the following lines:

Joga Singh is he who reckons neither victory nor defeat,
Ever-ready, he is bound to obey the command,
Joga Singh is he who reckons neither victory nor defeat.
(p. 36)

A contrary state of mind overtakes him at the other moment. Then the feeling grows in him that his identity partakes nothing of the spiritual and the divine. It only configures the saddle upon which he is seated while riding the horse. He also feels that his feet are not different from the stirrups in which they rest while he is on his way to the battlefield:

Reaching the battlefield it will be a hand only,
Never my whole self, I am either hand or foot only. (p. 36)

This link between the spiritual or the divine and the random or the mundane, howsoever problematic in the eighties, seemed to have broken in the nineties when Punjab was gripped by terror of the horrendous sort. Pash found the spiritual or the divine turn demonic at this new historical juncture with the result that the random and the mundane got driven into a servile situation almost. This becomes evident from one of his last poems 'Dharm Diksha lai Binai Patra' (Begging for alms of faith) later on to find a place amongst miscellaneous pieces brought together anonymously after his death.

This poem has as its interlocutor a poor village-woman whose husband and one son have already fallen victims to terror so rampant in Punjab in the eighties. Allegedly meant to safeguard religion and faith from

political assault, it was actually directed to politicise them for certain nefarious ends. The hapless and helpless village-woman is little aware of these intricacies. Of this she is certain that her younger son can any moment be killed by one or other cohort of the alleged defender of faith and religion. In a tone of utter servility, she beseeches the defender to spare the life of her surviving son. That her son be spared, she, without any compunction, finds fault with her husband who was earlier the provider of the family. Invoking the alleged defender of religion and faith as the Provider of humanity, she promises to act upon all his fundamentalistic dictates. The extent to which she demeans herself becomes evident from the following extract drawn from *Khilre hoi Warke* (Scattered Leaves) a collection of his miscellaneous pieces:

I shall worship totems you prescribe
And recite psalms you approve of,
I shall hold all other faiths futile,
I have only one demand, O Lord of faith,
For my only son . . .
The poor husband is not there to provide. (p. 100)

In the process, the alleged defender of faith emerges as a Devil, pure and simple, putting to shame all the benign attributes, which the Sikh Gurus invoked of the Almighty in their scriptural compositions given the generic name of *Gurbani*.

(3)

There is in this collection another cycle of poems which uncover the nature of politics and the oppressive and repressive role its institutions and agencies have played in the seventies. In this regard 'Emergency lagan ton Baadh' (After Emergency was imposed) is the first poem that comes to mind. Emergency promulgated in 1975 was a measure that in practice operated entirely different

from what it sounded in its rhetoric. Its rhetoric gave the message that it was a well-intentioned measure essential to safeguard civil life from disruption being caused by anti-social policies. It favoured the suspension of all democratic rights which the constitution, implemented in post-independence India, had ordained with so much subtlety and sobriety. Whether as signifier or signified, the Emergency was a source of deep despair.

It is this deep and at the same time inarticulate despair that the poem seeks to convey through synoptic utterances made by the collective personae as its interlocutor:

Except that some one is dead
Nothing is true of this intractable death,
All else are rumours only
For entertaining the ears,
Or else the coldness of impending winter. (p. 31)

These utterances draw attention to rumour-mongering and eavesdropping which suspended all the social interaction and political communication negotiated during the earlier eras. As a result, the celebratory stance of the polity looks so false before the lamentation that in muteness seems to arise from within the sulking hearts of the people. Corresponding to this vast spectacle is the closeup in which a random person seems caught between the actual terror that permeates the environment and the imaginary joy that is held forth by the rhetoric of this measure. The wish to see every thing horrible to come somehow to a happy ending is altogether enervating because it puts an end to all initiative and will to set things right and restore the balance.

'Apni Asurakhiata chon' (Risk that one's own insecurity poses) casts a more penetrating look on the role of the polity. Through its various agencies, the army, the police and the administration etc., all the policies which it

lays and the laws it promulgates, the polity actually becomes a source of insecurity for the people. Of course, their declared purpose is otherwise that, couched in the rhetoric of discipline, patriotism and system, deludes them with impunity. In reality, it is its own security that the polity ensures and to safeguard that it has to subject the people to optimum insecurity:

If security of the country means
That disrupting a strike brings glory to peace,
And valour goes with laying down life on the border,
And art flourishes at royal thresholds alone,
And labour is to curry favour with authority,
Then poses a danger to us all
This security of the country. (p. 56)

If this intractable hoax is not uncovered, there is no escape for the people from total surrender to the life-denying forces. That way, life both without consciousness and conscience, becomes imperative. It is a perversion that cannot be justified in the name of discipline and peace. Whoever tries this trick, only plays havoc with the creative and productive potential of the people. 'Saade Samian Vich' (In our times) portrays the country's dilemma in graphic detail. Born of historical causes, it has social enervation, political servility, impoverishment of the people and all-pervasive cynicism as its chief signifiers. On account of this dilemma, the optimum leader, come to the fore through elections, rests content only with assuming authoritarian power. The extent to which her authoritarianism gets mis-represented is evident from the way the custodians of revolutionary ideology, *i.e.* Marxism, find pleasure in becoming her acolytes. What to talk of Marxists of national status even those of international stature, go all the way to curry favour with her. This degeneration contaminates not only the intellectual strata but also the people at large. If they donot actively hail this project of sycophancy as history, they passively try to

ingratiate themselves with the authoritarian edifice. It is against all this that the poem raises a powerful protest:

This shame-faced event was to happen only to us,
With the most sacred words of the world
Becoming stepping stones for power,
Only we were to see Marx's leonine face
Roaming and bleating in the labyrinths of Delhi,
Only we were to see all this,
Friends, all this was to happen in our times only. (p. 67)

All these are motifs brought forth by the historical causes. To incorporate them into a poetic discourse was a challenge that Pash executed with great competence. He also saw to it that they registered themselves powerfully with the reading-public. So traditional motifs to which the people have spontaneously responded are deliberately introduced for comparison and contrast. Analogies of the desert, labyrinth, scarecrow and crossroad interface with those born of the project of sycophancy as history. Their interface does not so much overwhelm as it challenges and provokes, in keeping with the ideological intention of the poet.

To carry this shock and provocation towards deep understanding and ingrained realisation, was the purpose of his poem 'Dooshit Bhasa de Khilaf' (Against defiled language). The poem goes in the form of an address from a staggering swan to a fighter lying mortally wounded in the battlefield of Kalinga. Having perceived life both from above and below and thereby become a paradigm of complete understanding and realisation, the swan uncovers all the issues which, having acquired religious and metaphysical aura, are holding humanity in thrall from times immemorial. In this regard, religion, ethnicity, history, time, art and literature with language over-arching them all, enter into his address to delineate the predicament to which humanity has been dragged. For all their

claim to subtlety and sobriety, awakening and enlightenment, they have only led the people astray into illusions from which escape at the present juncture is highly improbable if not altogether impossible. How these monuments of civilisation are at the same time vehicles of barbarity becomes evident from what language decodes and encodes for humanity's sake:

How villainous is language replete with impotence,
History is the name it gives to the wound inflicted
And civilisation to its recurrence.
It mystifies flying words into swans
And peas, beans and rice grains into pearls.
This it knows that ***manosoravar*** *releases rivers*
To justify lunacy for naming land as country. (p. 62)

(4)

The acme of all this is reached in 'Comrade naal Galbaat' (Talking to a comrade) a long poem questioning the persistent decline of ideology *i.e.* Marxism in India. Consisting of six sections, it has as its addressor a youngman whom actuality has made aware of all the hurdles of life. The pleasures of youth have not come his way at all. Past adolescence, he has a concrete but incoherent grasp of life's experiences. In this regard, the addressee, supposedly his former class-mate and friend, is his antipode in every sense of the word. He is acutely doctrinal by nature. Categories and concepts sway his mind as bitter facts and painful incidents stare the other in the face. His doctrinal nature is as far away from goodsense as is the commonsense of the other. After all, goodsense is critical and coherent, actual and theoretical and experiential and cognitive at the same time. Being like two sides of the same coin, the addressor and the addressee have only partial perceptions of life *i.e.* critical and concrete in one case and doctrinal and conceptual in the other.

Akin to actuality as the addressor is, he regards the filiative mode as the essential terrain of life. The economic disabilities, social hurdles and political constraints which keep a subaltern family at the subsistent level, are for him the determining factors of experiences and relationships. The addressee for whom the ideological mode is sacrosant, reads only escapism in all this. Ideas as the shapers of life hold a powerful sweep over his mind. The addressor does not find it hard to contest his counterpart because mere concepts and categories seem only to cover or conceal the reality. Rather than get dialogic, their points of view remain monologic. From the first section itself, the addressor is able to corner the addressee. That he is a racer rather than escapist is a point which categories and concepts the addressee draws upon, cannot demolish at all. He has very many bitter facts to recall for affirming his contention. The formulations which charm his counterpart can only refract or deflect his perceptions. The first two sections of the poem are taken up with this elucidation of their conflicting points of view.

The addressee proceeds with his perception of life by looking at it through a mode comprising random objects:

Salute to you o' cold kettle
And to times boiling in you!
Salute to you o' crawling bird
And the sky petrified in you. (p. 69)

The perception of time and its mobility through a petrified object and of space and its stillness through a bird in motion lays the basis of life being a contradictory complex. Meandering through the interplay of other metaphors like the ascetic driven to the jungle by his sexual instinct and the youth finding life's purpose in flaunting his moustaches, he brings his discourse to the crucial issue of fact versus ideology. The addressor is nurtured upon Engels (1820-1895) whose writing namely

Origin of Family and Private Property forms a grounded view about the central role of filiation in the life of a person. His counterpart mythicises the whole thing and this biologically constituted unit become social, ends up as something vaporous in his eyes. For him class-conflict is the ultimate criterion of life. Rather than see how other factors ranging from the random to the essential, constitute it, he has a metaphysical view in which exclusion and erasure seem its basic functions.

The filiative mode of life adopted by the addressor looks veritable to him against all arguments to the contrary. This veracity, drawn from textual evidence also, recalls actual experience to substantiate it. The game that they in childhood would play together, had family rather than class-conflict as the node of life. No wonder, all the jokes, which the odd look of an ideologue is likely to generate, are not without an element of truth. What acquires carnivalesque importance in life has its roots in such jokes. Life in the filiative mode has brought far more rigours to the addressor, thereby actually acquiring the authority that the addressee has conceptually reserved for class-conflict:

Comrade, how counter to revolution and class
Has our sister grown!
She hides her pebbles
Underneath my erudite books,
For all the wisdom drilled into her head
She is worried more about play
Than society's future. (p. 73)

How mere doctrine is destined to lag behind actual experience can no better be contended. This contention reserves for him the right to explicate the actual experience he has waded through. The category of class-conflict may not be cogent for its explication but that does not invalidate its veracity. The brutal treatment meted out to

him by the custodians of discipline and punishment, leaves no doubt in his mind that its sub-text is beyond any text an ideologue with all the methodology at his command may compose with whatever tenacity:

Would that I had not suffered
The terrible collousness writ so large
Upon subordinate's scrutinising face,
Only if I had not seen the nap
In which the judges swathe
Before and after their lunch-break. (pp. 74-75)

From this terminal moment, it becomes easy for the addressor to see how his counterpart has actually gone to the side of the enemies. Under the garb of carrying on the class-struggle, he has actually betrayed the popular cause. He has become one with the collaborationists who include intellectuals. They diffuse human thinking with their confused writings. For the addressor they also include literary idealogues who, like red professors of Trotsky's concept, are adept only in trading terms, categories and concepts. All this critique is mounted by him in the fourth section.

As a result, the addressee feels unnerved. He resorts to the cacophony of slogans in the fifth section. This cacophony is no answer to the insights which the addressor has gathered from the raw material of life. Texts with path-breaking sub-texts have also equipped him to refute his flamboyant assertions. The linguistic level of the dilemma from which his mother suffers is a cogent example of his deep understanding of life:

Unacquainted with intricacies of grammar
Shivering in chilling naivety of old age
She takes the proper for the common
And the common for the collective name.
She feels that some caste or concept gets killed
Whenever and wherever the bullet is fired. (p. 81)

This understanding leaves enough space at his disposal to celebrate the alignment that his poetic art has forged. The sixth section is taken up with this celebration. It reaches its climax at the moment when the addressor wishes his poems to dissolve into life *i.e.* to animate it through their annihilation. The incident to have consummated Newton's work is a model for his own work to reach the culmination:

For a moment I wish that from somewhere
May come the hermit, Newton's Diamond,
And fell the candle headlong
In the open slit of my brain,
And reduce them to ashes
Before certain incomplete reports
Get moulded into a theory,
For too much risk rests in their non-burning. (p. 84)

6

Miscellaneous Writings

After his death, three writings of Pash have posthumously appeared in print. The first two are in prose which go a long way to show how writing in prose was also becoming his forte. Polemical prose writing interpellated with poetic and reflective moments came quite naturally to him. Retrospectively so it seems now, though at the time of writing them he might have laboured a lot at their coherence. The third one is a collection of his poems which he noted down in his diary or assorted notebook. With the exception of six or seven, the others are poetic impressions or syncopated utterances not then worthy of publication in book-form. Perhaps, he was yet waiting for the opportune moment to work upon them so that they grew into complex texts before their definite publication. All the same, they show the change occurring in his poetic practice and the orientation it was acquiring to reckon with new situations and experiences.

(1)

The first of these posthumous writings is *Pash di Diary* (Diary Pash's). Most of its entries pertain to two years *i.e.* 1974 and 1982, the wide gap inbetween showing that diary-writing was not his regular vocation. Some entries do relate to the year 1976 but they are only a few in number. One of the most interesting entries is of June 1975 in which he has tried to reflect upon the discipline that diary-writing entails. As he has written in quite a candid way, "Diary-writing demands a particular type of piety, devotion and vigour from the writer . . . It is like reckoning with one's own self and as well with events." (June 10, 1975) In other words, he regarded diary-writing as the mode to evaluate and re-evaluate events and experiences happening to a person.

Pash had not reserved any particular time of the day for this purpose. He could resort to diary-writing at any time depending upon the impulse to do so. For example, he wrote the above mentioned entry at 3.30 a.m. at night. He ends it with the resolve to resume diary-writing with all the regularity at his command. It is a different matter that almost one year was to elapse before he could act upon his resolve. Sometimes, the incident happened earlier is later recorded for recollection and celebration. The most poignant of such recollected and celebrated incidents relates to the kiss his beloved agreed to bestow upon him after almost two years of his craving. Thus goes its description; "To make the earlier moment relive, the comely fog of the early dawn of 17th of September 1973, has suddenly acquired the form of this cloud-laden fine evening." (August 3, 1975)

These entries are of varying length. The lengthy ones dilate upon the landscape, folk-songs and the rituals to which they relate in seasonal terms. Some of them give graphic description of the village-people, particularly of middle-aged women and unmarried girls busy in their hearths and homes or performing arduous jobs as part of their domestic chores. Their behaviour, when grouped together on the occasion of some marriage or some celebration in the village gurdwara, never misses his discovering eye. It is the descriptive mode that these entries employ in the first instance though interpellation of ideological and reflective comments is also to be found in them.

Brief entries, which are very many in number, donot dispense with evocative content altogether. Sometimes, the nuances which they generate are so provocative that the reader is impelled to read in between the lines or even to evoke the sub-text. For example the entry to the effect "the 8th Guru got relief on breathing his last but nothing is there to provide me for," (April 5, 1974) cannot be grasped

without elaborating it in its double context. Likewise, such an entry as this, "those who intend the goodwill of lovers should know that love is not the name of a season," (September 25, 1974) cannot be appreciated by confining it to its text. "Today was a rainy day, with my eagerness for such days knowing no bounds, I feel as if all my life is a waiting for them," (January 12, 1976) is an observation that more than the seasonal, needs cultural context for appreciation and understanding.

There are a couple of entries which project his views of one or the other contemporary poet. The most perceptive of them is about Shiv Batalvi (1930-1973) in which his motifs of longing, death, despair, loneliness and sorrow are subjected to a bitter critique. In almost a devastating tone, the entry goes,

"Failure to consummate union with the beloved cannot be that powerful a motif for poetic practice. It is strange that all that he like a death-haunted person pours out about separation, sorrow, sadness, loneliness, despair and the cruelty of injured feelings should draw attention in the name of metaphysical aloofness, despair over the crudity of social values and philosophical distraction. . . . If lyrical outburst makes pain bearable that does not mean it holds an ideal antidote against suffering." (March 15, 1982)

Of course, diary-writing does not attain consummate level in Pash. Nevertheless, it sets a trend that contemporary Punjabi writers can ignore at their own peril.

(2)

The next is *Pash dian chithian* (Pash's Letters) in which he engages variegated issues of life both with passion and profundity. There are about eighty letters, of which not more than twenty are sketchy in form. Others are relatively detailed, the lengthiest one written to the contemporary poet Surjit Patar (1945) being of ten pages.

Most of them were written to friends, fellow poets and critics. Only a few are addressed to the family-members, his father, younger sister, her husband and his own wife, Rajwinder. Since this compilation was brought out in haste, it does not include all his letters. Even some crucial ones could not be included of which at least three were found by the author of this monograph heaped in unkempt boxes before his departure for U.S.A. One of them is addressed to himself that shows how letter-writing was a passion with him.

For Pash, letter-writing was a creative genre and its scope could not be confined to the exchange of information only. Heart-revealing intimacy, depth-delving confession, dispassionate analysis and self-analysis and intellectual reflection seemed to him to figure as much in letter-writing. No wonder, in his letters to his family-members problems and worries which beset them together, are discussed with candidness that hardly ever diverges into crudity or arrogance. In his letter to his father, he does not hesitate to talk of "mental and physical sufferings," the moral despair from which none can ever be free and his sexual urge that by then was unconsummated. At the same time, he is not disposed to make a fetish of himself as a poet. That is why he writes, "I feel that I am just a writer. Alongwith, I am a son and brother with full obligation to those with whom I am thus related. This makes it imperative for me to foresake certain rights. I have resolved to do so though this will force me into several hardships." (pp. 45-46)

Overflowing with rich content are his letters written to friends, fellow-poets and contemporary critics. For him the criterion of friendship or for that matter of any meaningful relationship did not imply the abolition of differences. Rather, it rested upon making all the differences animate so as to arrive at some richer and more creative perception. That is why he stood for the most open form of

articulation. If abuse could serve the purpose of this articulation, he was not against its usage even. No wonder, he wrote to a friend, "I am your friend and so can hurl an abuse but would not like to preach to you. When I write to you, infact it is with my own self that I engage in dialogue. Do learn to find fault with my observations. If you don't find fault with them, we shall not afford to remain intimate friends. Undiscerning friend is of no use at all." (p. 41)

In these letters, commensurate responses are sought from those whom they are addressed. Even though the addressor, he is in no doubt that his addressee can change place with him and the recipient of his letter can write back to contradict all his contentions. As a result, he does not feel shy of putting forth even onerous and cumbersome demands. If one friend is asked to send volumes of Trotsky, Neruda and Brecht, then the other is coaxed to render some financial help so as to make his position resilient from that angle. At the same time, he can contend with persistence that he is not a stingy person. For example, he urges his friend to finance his visit to England. At the same time, he reminds him, "Of course, I have a strong desire to go abroad but not by abjectly supplicating any one. I want to go abroad not to hoard money but to broaden my understanding and enrich my experience." (p. 74)

There are letters in which he tries to unravel the problematics of revolutionary poetry and poetics. He is of the firm opinion that hegemonic awareness is required for their growth and development. In this he finds the contribution of Neruda and Brecht of crucial significance. Of course, what distinguishes Brecht's estranging aesthetics from Neruda's empathising one is not fully clear to him. All the same, the way lies in the direction paved by their poetic practice upon which he feels Latin-American and African poets are proceeding. Which poets of the third world has he in mind does not become clear from his

contention though there is not anything to find fault with his observation. Be that as it may, he does not feel that the correctness of ideology should be the basis for evaluating the merit of poetry. So to a fellow poet he contends, "Infact, excellent poetry can come forth from false ideology as its true version can generate really hopeless output.' (p. 178)

What is crucial for him is the extent to which new techniques and strategies are made to flourish through poetic practice. "The drawback does not lie in the employment of already used strategies and techniques but in the fact that their off-shoots are not made to strike root," (p. 179) is his observation with regard to modern poetry in Punjabi. Alien influences can hasten this process but the categorical imperative is that their role should be of catalysing and crystalising nature. They should not prove burdensome at all. Surely, Pash made this contention on the basis of what he sought to learn from Neruda and Brecht. All this makes essential the writing of impure poetry though not in the sense in which the new critics denigraded it through contrast with its pure counterpart. He wanted impure poetry to come into its own as Neruda and Brecht brought it forth by embedding it with motifs drawn from the actuality of life. Deliberate effort to become popular seemed to him a diversionary tactic, rather a terrorist act. That is why his considered view was that "the poet has nothing to lose or gain in the material sense but he has the whole universe to cultivate his feelings." (p. 185) In this way, this collection awards to letter-writing a calibre that earlier it did not have in Punjabi at all. Whether after his exit, this calibre has been maintained by other Punjabi writers seems controversial to contend.

(3)

Pash's miscellaneous poems numbering more than sixty were put together in a posthumous collection named

Khilre hoi Varke (Scattered Leaves). They are mostly short poems, sometimes syncopated in utterance. Perhaps Pash had noted them down in the belief that only after having elaborated their motifs and chiselled their expression, would he bring them out in book-form. All the same, some poems do delineate the direction in which his poetic practice was likely to progress, more so under Bertolt Brecht's influence. How Pash could have negotiated a relationship between Neruda's empathising and Brecht's estranging mode does not get fully clear from these poems. The cantours of his probable growth do come into view from the study of their short and syncopated structures and textures.

In this regard, the poems first of all to draw attention are 'Dharam Diksh lai Patar' (Begging for alms of faith) and 'Bedakhli lai Binai Patar' (Application for disinheritance). The first eloquently voices the terror that the people had to suffer from self-styled defenders of faith. As has already been explicated, it has as its interlocutor a hapless and helpless village-woman whose husband and elder son have already been killed by the terrorists. Her remaining son is under all-pervasive threat and she begs for his reprieve if not long life. In return for that, she is willing to repose faith in the alleged lord of faith who infact is the messenger of death.

The second poem expresses the feeling of outrage evoked by the massacre of ordinary Sikhs in Delhi in the wake of Mrs. Indra Gandhi's assassination. So outraged does the interlocutor feel on this score that he regards disenfranchisement more honourable than citizenship of a country of which the polity authorises such horrible massacre-cum-carnage:

If the whole country mourns the death of one
Against whom I thought and wrote all my life,
Then my name off its register do strike. (p. 102)

There is a group of small poems in which the genre of letter-writing is employed. 'Ik khat' (A letter), 'Udik' (Waiting), 'Kujh pall hore' (Only a few moments more), 'Tainoo (To you), 'Toon' (You), and 'Wafa' (Trust) are worthy of mention in this regard. Heart-revealing intimacy, chiselled expression and depth-delving confession so characteristic of letter-writing seem to frame the structure and texture of these poems. The first and the last convey the obvious impression of the altered locale *i.e.* the foreign country from where they are written back home. Unlike most writing to come from abroad, they are neither nostalgic for the native land nor cynical of it under the lure of novelty available in the foreign land. They forward alternatives which are fractured and fraught at the same time. As the interlocutor suggests to the loved one back home:

You keep on staying in the motherland itself
For some day to your purlieu I shall return,
Either myself or this step
At least one will have to vanish then. (p. 82)

This fractured and fraught alternative clearly suggests that for Pash to migrate abroad did not mean to settle permanently over there. It also did not mean transfer of money back home as non-resident Indians are wont and want to do. Complex choices marked this step which he had taken to be invisible rather than absent from the terror-filled scenario of the native land. There in U.S.A. he wrote a poem 'Sabh ton Khatarnak' (Ominous) that through sober and subtle reflection, carves out human sympathy as the arbiter of a person's destiny. For him all the discursive means which structures, institutions, state-appratuses and educational methods employ, are dangerous. However, the danger they pose gets ominous only when as a result, human beings get deprived of their feelings and emotions or visions and dreams:

Ominous is in fact
To be filled with dead silence,
Lose concern and bear all unconcerned,
To become the slave of routine,
Ominous is infact
The death of our dreams. (p. 104)

Further to conclude:

Ominous is the quarter
In which the sun of conscience sets
And the fragment of its dead silence
Enters a part of your body:
Loss of labour is not ominous
Nor is torture by the police,
Even the greed that betrays is not ominous. (p. 105)

However problematic his stay abroad, it was opening his poetic art to those aspects of life which like routine, molecular living, rationalisation and professionalisation are of crùcial importance in the first world. As a result, his modern poetry oriented under influence ranging from Neruda's to that of Brecht, was getting responsive to post-modern situations as well. However, this trajectory could not proceed further. As ill-luck would have it, he was killed when he had not completed even the thirty eighth year of his life. Whatever he wrote during his brief but eventful life, bore deep concern with the experiences of his countrymen in particular and of the common people of the world in general. This concern is his heritage to his fellow poets also to whom his epitaph is in short addressed:

I have no face
No voice of my own,
Blind passion for the earth is mine.

That is why it seems
I shall get across all
Like the rustling wind.
Friends!
Hold on tight to my concern
After I have passed by. (p. 41)

Selected Poems

I

In Pursuit of Flying Eagles

Eagles have flown aloft taking in their beaks
Our desire for a moment's life of peace.
Friends, let us indeed,
In pursuit of the flying eagles, proceed.

Who knows when may come over here
Critics wearing red badges
And start the campaign
To pour false praise on poems
Before the daily expanding building
Of the police-station—
To take into grasp your village, your family
The trembling leaf of your self-respect—
Gets glued to the daily record
Of that rapier-tongued munshi;
It is better now indeed,
In pursuit of the flying eagles, proceed.

In your whole life will not get repaid
Loan on sister's marriage incurred,
Every drop of blood
Sprinkled in the fields
Will not provide colour
Enough to paint the face
Of a serene smiling person.
To add to it further
All the nights of life put together

Will not count down the stars of the sky;
Then, friends, let us, indeed,
In pursuit of the flying eagles proceed.

If you have had on your tongue
The taste of hot *gur* cooling in the trough,
And seen with open eyes
The glow in the moon-lit night
Of the moist field when levelled,
You will definitely do then something
About that devouring vote's paper
That casts grabbing looks
On the green crops in our fields.
Those who have seen golden corncobs
Of maize drying on our roofs,
But have not come across
Contracting prices in the market,
Will never come to grasp
The enmity professed
By that ruling woman in Delhi
With this bare footed village damsel.
In this dungeon of life
When your voice to yourself returns,
Dreams like the unstruck neck of the old ox
In rankling eyes burn,
And the dirt of the streets sticks
To life's most beautiful years;
Then the best thing to do
Is, friends, indeed,
In pursuit of the flying eagles to proceed.

II

The Wound of the Thorn

He lived a long life
For his name to survive.

The earth was vast
And his village was small;
All his life he slept under one thatched roof,
All his life he defecated in the same field;
And always he wished
For his name to survive.

All his life he heard three sounds only:
One was the crowing of the cock,
The other was the muffling of animals,
And the third was of the morsel chewed.
In the silken light of sand dunes,
He never heard the sound of the setting sun,
He never heard the blossoming of flowers in spring;
The stars never sang a song for him.

All his life he knew three hues only:
One was the hue of the earth
That he could not take to even once.
The other was the hue of the sky
That bore several names
But none came easy to him.
The last was the hue of his wife's cheeks
That in modesty he never named all his life.

He could compete in eating turnips,
Many a time he won the bet in eating maize,
But himself he got eaten without a bet.

Years of his life like ripe melons
Were as such eaten away in full.
Like milk milched fresh
His goodness was gulped with relish,
The awareness never dawned on him
How prosperous was he in health.

The instinct to survive in the world
Pursued him relentless like the biting bee;
Like a statue he stood
That called for no celebration.

The way from his thatched house
Still leads to the well,
In his foot print lost
Under millions of others,
Laughs yet the wound of the thorn,
Laughs yet the wound of the thorn.

III

In Her Name

My dear, you must be complaining of my love
That your fond wishes have gone waste for me.
Have gone waste the sun-light and the shade
You with fond needle wove in handkerchiefs.

A poet though I have missed to read
The poetry of promise reflected in your eyes,
On my lips reserved for you, my dear,
Has dried the bitter and tasteless song of bread.

My adoration, my integrity are doubly wounded,
Wounded is your laughter as of linseed flowers;
They take me away, the enemies of your happiness,
Leaving behind the shameless rattle of handcuffs.

It is on your door only that my head bows,
Time and again I deride the prison-door;
Only in my village do I live effaced,
But defy the rulers with relentless derision.

All my pain passes through the point of needle,
Ravaged is the peace of thoughts and of fields;
Those who marauded grace from the fields,
Have now become the enemies of your beauty.

I have seen wheat-crop nourished on dew,
With modesty lurking in her eyes,
Sun-light relaxing on the flowing water,
I have seen the moon kissing the sleepy trees.

I have seen fragrance chanting from wild flowers,
Seen the minting machine operating in cotton-crops;
Seen the fodder-crops changing hue chamleon-like,
I have seen the evening descending on mustard-crops.

My every joy is tied to the freedom of the crops,
Every peasants' tale tells the story of your smile;
My fate is one with the fate of the changing time,
My tale is but the tale of the shining sword.

Bitterness has so hardened my face
That moon-light gets scratched at its sight,
My life's bitterness holds for history
The position strong enough for people to revive.

IV

A Grass-like Person's Tale

While grazing camels, your loving brother
Is by camels grazed away.
Sister! He will never come to see you now.

How I wished to come
And make your mother-in-law divulge
The *ghee* so far kept hidden,
And into her forehead hurl
Bowl with bare sugar filled!
Strange is the tale of wicked camels,
Neither are they themselves to be seen
Nor is visible the dust they raise.
Audible is only the sound their gums make
When songs of herdsmen they munch away.

I had this feeling in mind
That enough for them is greenery
Spread out in my eyes.
When they munched away my hands
They little knew how disabled I got,
O, father, to carry your blind limb's burden.

Now the joy I was to bring for your present
Is hung on acacia-tree at the border,
Like the unused coffin.
Crops, grown with such thrift, my sister,
Lie trampled by playful camels.

V

Commitment

We don't want anything for form's sake:
Like muscles pulled in the back of our arms,
Or lashes prominently visible
On the backs of the oxen,
Or our future sacred and shrunk
In the affidavits of loans;
We want everything actual
Of life, equality and what not.

As the sun, the wind and the cloud
Remain close to us in houses and fields;
Likewise we want to have
Of polity, belief and joy,
A feel close to our lives,
Mighty ones, we want everything actual.

We don't want anything hoax-like
As a touts' evidence falsely concocted
In a case of illicit distillation;
Fairness that a patwari may profess,
Or the oath the middleman may take—
A fact on the palm of our hand we want
Like saltish tinge in sugar-cane's jaggery
Or nicotene in the burning hookah;
Something like skein on the beloved's lips
The lovers feels on kissing, we want.

We don't want books to read
Tucked on the lathis of the police;
We don't want to hear

Songs to the tune of military boots declaimed,
With yearning finger-tips we want to feel
Songs resonating on the tops of trees.
To taste something bitter in tear-gas,
Or one's own blood on the tongue to taste,
Is recreation for none;
But we don't want anything for form's sake
We want everything actual
Life, socialism or what not . . .

VI

After Emergency was Imposed

Except that someone is dead
Nothing is true of this intractable death,
All else are rumours only
For entertaining the ears
Or else the coldness of the impending winter.

Mourning without, celebration within,
A sadness, as of a cotton-crop picked
That was there before he died,
Will with insidious intent scream
To the opening and closing of our doors.

Except that graves will not change their nature
Nothing is true of this intractable death,
Like the second half of the rising swing
One is muffled in expectation,
Holding his fear and joy betwixt his thighs.
The prayer for its uninterrupted ending
Pours molten lead in our ears.

This fear that Thursday will lose
To the clarion-call of Friday
Encourages some to take to killing,
The blame lies not on the rifleman only;
As much blame do we also carry
For whom collacium in the eyes
Causes curfew for the tears.
Except that someone is dead
All are rumours only
For entertaining the ears.

VII

In a Meeting of Mourning

To mourn the tear gone dry in the beard:
Let us stand still for a while
And think
This old man must have imagined
Life like a jaggery lump only.
All his life from his eyes
He could not drive away the image of the onion.

Let us think of the bright day's smile
That carrying its wasted blood
Descended daily to the night's interior;
Let us think of history
That has named this intrigue as time.

Let us bow in memory of the weak sigh
That far away from the capital has died,
And for a moment believe
That the dying sigh
With our national flag
Must have claimed a very intimate tie.

VIII

Flock of Sparrows

Flock of sparrows will not take flight,
Here and there will cut grass on the field's sides,
Will carry stale chapatis to fields afar,
Dipping dirty head-gears in water
Will rub them on their sun-burnt faces.

Flock of sparrows will not take flight,
Here and there hiding from public gaze,
Will their damned youth lament
All by itself with full-throated ease.

Flock of sparrows will not an inkling have
Of a net of iron-made beaks;
Expand from somewhere the sky in front,
And the dream of a long flight,
Will mortally fear her fawning eyes.

For nothing, flock of sparrows despairs
After the bride's departure;
Loving father will mend the dismantled door;
With cloth from toys torn, will be sewn
His shirt smelling foul with sweat;
By itself spun into balls it will not pine—
Flock of sparrows for the spinning-wheel.

Flock of sparrows will not take flight
For some far-off country,
Will always feel the itch of fodder,
The spot of menses on the white sheet
Will mock it all its life.

IX

Joga Singh's Self-Analysis

Where in the battlefield shall I hide, O friends,
My wounds sustained earlier?
My three vows will neither be a shield
Nor lonesome become a balm for me.

When I started, the five k's mounted alongwith,
My hand had the feel of the horse's reins,
Unaware that my own rein lay
In the clutches of the wild ways;
They led me to the brothel at one time
And to the magical lakes at the other,
Where chanting birds learnt in bliss
Tha art of peaceful death.

I had never thought that
Ways have their own volition;
A brief one though, the three vows
Register their own history and
Become the sixth 'k' now;
When will the fever of three vows
Leave my flesh, O Lord!
It mattered nothing
If only the Guru I had disobeyed;
Reaching the battlefield it will be a hand only
Never my whole self, I am either the foot or the hand only.

What about the fourth vow now?
Sometimes it seems that the fourth vow
Is the resplendent corner of a world,
Bereft of all other corners

If I am vanquished in the battlefield
The onus will lie on the six k's in short.

Joga Singh is he who reckons neither victory nor defeat,
Every-ready he is bound to obey the command
Joga Singh is he who reckons neither victory nor defeat.

X

Risk that One's Insecurity Poses

If security of the country is a condition
For life without conscience,
For consent to every mandate—
Under the eyelid obscene;
And the mind to prostrate before depravity,
Then poses a danger to us all
This security of the country.

We regard the country auspicious as home
Wherein tedium is not to be found at all,
And man struts the streets like flowing rainfall,
With graceful movements of wheat stalks
To impart meaning to the vastness of the sky.

We regard the country as embrace-like feeling
As some stimulant like toil,
As some faith like sacrifice;
If it is a factory for bonded labour
A laboratory for owls to manufacture,
All this then poses a danger to the people.

If security of the country means
That a slide from the heights of loan
May fragment our existence like falling stones,
The shamefaced laughter of price-rise
May spit on the faces of emoluments,
And bathing in one's own blood
Is like going on pilgrimage,
Then peace poses a danger to the people.

If security of the country means
That disrupting a strike brings glory to peace
And valour goes with laying down life on the border,
And art flourishes at royal thresholds alone
And labour is to curry those exercising authority,
Than poses a danger to us all
This security of the country.

XI

Ominous

Ominous is not loot of labour,
Or torture by the police,
Even greed that betrays is not most ominous at all.

To get caught unwares is rather bad,
Rather bad is to be muffled in timid silence,
But this is not ominous at all.

To get lost in the noise of corruption
To submit even when right is rather bad,
Rather bad is to read in the light of the glowworm,
To pass with lips screwed is bad
But this is not ominous at all.

Ominous is infact
To be filled with dead silence,
Lose concern and bear all things unconcerned,
To become the slave of routine,
Ominous is in fact
The death of our dreams.

Ominous is the watch
That vibrant on your wrist
Seems still when looked for time.

The eye is ominous
That sees all but is cold as ice,
That forgets to feel the world with love
And falls for the sizzling blindness of things,
That imbibing the ordinariness of the world
Gets lost in the useless routine of life.

Ominous is the moon
That after each killing
Rises in courtyard muffled in silence,
But does not rancour like peppers in the eyes.

Ominous is the song
That to reach your ears
Goes beyond mourning,
And laughs like the cough of a boss
On the thresholds of the frightened faces.

Ominous is the night
In which owls shriek and jackals cry
Clinging to frames of eternally closed doors.

Ominous is the quarter
On which the sun of conscience sets
And the fragment of its dead silence
Enters a part of your body:
Loss of labour is not ominous,
Nor is torture by the police,
Even the greed that betrays is not ominous.

XII

Trust

After years of pining for you
I have long since forgotten
The verity of my own voice,
The language I learnt to look human
Gave me words just enough
To compose your name.
It is long since letters
Lost their accent for me,
Except to draw the image of your sunny limbs—

I can't write anything now.
Have you ever seen lines rise in revolt?
All words dropping from my hands
Only your picture do compose.

You are with me but only a pace apart
And this pace is perhaps longer than
Not just my age but several lives;
And expanding as without a break
It will some day engulf the whole earth
And take measure of the lifeless heavens.
You keep on staying in the motherland itself
For some day to your purlieu I shall return,
Either myself or this step
At least one will have to vanish, then.

XIII

A Letter

Our mood is fine, of your own do write.
Write of ships gone asleep
At the bottom of the sea,
Of turmoil the journey entails,
Of itch and thud it contains.

Of God's death, write,
And what to his saints has happened,
How those saints have fared,
At whose hands, has God then died.

Butchers of language and feelings,
Who at each others' throat had got,
Of them, who came out the conqueror,
Do at the earliest, write.

Write if those marauders are under arrest,
At whose hands our nation's tongue,
Has got so much defiled,
Through whose parole, it to chaff is consigned.

Write if water's urge to ebb
In floods is swept or preserved,
Our mood is fine, of your own do write.

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