Popular Folk Poetry of Punjab

Harvinder Singh

Most of the SAARC countries including India have one common characteristic that these had been predominantly the agrarian societies for very long period. Agrarian societies are in a very close interaction with nature while producing or processing the production. Nature and poetry to a great extent are interrelated. Nature enhances people's creativity and inspires them to celebrate it in the expressive words of music which we know as songs. These songs embody their hopes, fears, dreams and aspirations. In traditional agricultural society most of the activities are performed collectively. This kind of collectivity and closeness to nature create favorable conditions and constructive environment community singing. Such poetry composed and sung by common masses is generally known as folk poetry. In this paper an attempt is made to present some of the popular and representative forms/themes of folk poetry of Punjab with special reference to two lines poetry which is most common and is known as tappa in Punjab. These poems have been presented in Punjabi language in Roman script on the right side along with its English translation on the left side. These poems are self explanatory and hardly need further elaboration or explanation. Therefore a very limited analysis has been made only at the relevant places.

Punjab derived its name from water. Punj is Five and Ab means water. Present Punjab is divided between India and Pakistan. As per 2008 census of Pakistan there were 7.65 crore Punjabi speaking people in Pakistan. Similarly there were 2.91 crore Punjabi speaking people in India as per 2001 census. Pakistan has the highest Punjabi speaking population followed by India. In addition to it a large number of Punjabis are living in other parts of various countries of the world. Punjabi is the 12th largest spoken language of the world. Punjab is known for having fertile plain land, great soldiers and healthy/tall men & women. Because of its healthy people/soldiers and fertile land it is known as sword and food basket of nation. In the last century, the State boundaries have shifted twice- the violent partition of India in 1947 and reorganisation of states in 1966. Present Indian Punjab has 50362 sq.kms. geographical area which constitutes only 1.5% of the total area of the country. But it contributes 42% wheat and 30% rice to central pool of food grains of the nation. Similarly west Punjab is also the most prosperous state of Pakistan.

Punjab has a very rich tradition of folklore including folk poetry. Even a large number of songs and tunes of Hindi films are today being based on poetry and the content of Punjabi folk songs. In Punjab folk
poetry have passed from generation to generation for centuries in an oral form. It has been created by anonymous folk poets. It is a verbal creation based on collective folk wisdom. Punjab is predominantly an agrarian state. Agriculture is known as the culture of Punjab. As mentioned above folk poetry is the product of pre-industrialized, agrarian societies which were in a very constructive and dialectical relationship with nature. In such societies nature in itself had been appearing to the rural folk as a dancing and singing entity in the form of the changing seasons, blowing wind and chirping birds. See the following folk poem where seasons are described as making thread on the spinning wheels of the Sun:

*O! The Earth, fond of love*  
*Dhartia piar karendie*

*There is a lyrical song among songs*  
*Shandan vichon shand*

*The seasons are making thread*  
*Dah sooraj da charkhera*

*On the spinning wheel of sun.*  
*Rutan kadhan tand*

Look at another folk poem where trees are described as singing songs of soul:

*The Pipal tree is singing, the Boharr tree is singing*  
*Pipal gavey Boharr gavey*

*Singing is the tree of Toot*  
*Gavey hariola Toot*

*Listen them quietly o! traveler*  
*Kharke sun rahia*

*Your soul will become pure*  
*Teri rooh hajoogi soot*

All these beautiful natural conditions inspired the masses to compose and sing poetry with the singing nature. Farmers (*Hali*) during tilling the land, shepherds (*Vagi*) grazing animals, women at the spinning wheels, girls embroidering phukari and artisans at their crafts will sing & compose poetry. In addition to it during the period of pre mechanized agriculture most of the operations were performed manually using biological power -
both human and animal. In other words the operations such as tilling, sowing and harvesting etc. were carried out in a sufficient longer period as compared to present day mechanized agriculture. Moreover agriculture was based on monsoon and there was a lot of free time and leisure after sowing which was utilized for creative purposes. Women folks were engaged primarily in domestic work. Absence of men from house during day time created space for women to sing while fetching water from well or spinning wheels.

As mentioned earlier nature to a greater extent inspired people to become more creative and poetic. Nature and greenery have been flourishing in Punjab from the ancient period due to adequate availability of surface & rain water and good climatic conditions. A large areas were covered with dense & thick forests known as Jungle or Bela. There was a great diversity in nature in the form of six seasons in a year. This seasonal diversity led to a very rich bio diversity in this area. An eminent Punjabi poet Dhani Ram Chetrik describes natural beauty of Punjab in following lines:

"Eh Punjab karan ki sifat teri, shanan de sabh saman tere
Jal paun tere, hariayol teri, darya parbat maaidan tere,
Bharat de sir te chhatar tere tera tere sir te chhatar Himala da
Modhe te chadar barfan dee seenay vich sek Jawala da.

It means:

O! Punjab I have no words to praise you
You have everything to be full of pride
Your climate, your greenery, your rivers, your mountains, your fields
You are crown on the head of India
Himalaya is crown on your head
You have cover of snow on your shoulders (mountains)
And warmth of Jawala (Spiritual Devi) in your heart.
Such beautiful natural conditions, changing seasons & attractive landscape have been inspiring people to compose & sing poetry. Vedas are the earliest form of creative poetry composed here which is a great milestone in the ancient poetry of world. Later on Naths & Jogies composed another form of distinct poetry. Then poetry composed by Gurus, Pirs, Baghtas and Bhattas etc. is one of he finest form of poetry composed on this land which have been compiled in Holy Book of Sikhs "Sri Guru Granth Sahib". Similarly a large number of folk poems are composed by the common men and women in the form of lullabies, proverbs, songs related to birth, death, marriage domestic rituals etc. As mentioned above although there are lot of diversities & variations in the form of folk poetry yet two lines short form known as *tappa* is the most popular form. Following *tappas* express various kinds of folk life of Punjab.

**Theme: lover-beloved**

*Sand of your fresh foot prints*  
*Teri sajri pairr da reta*

*I gather and press to my heart*  
*Chuk chuk lawan hik nu*

These lines describe pain and sorrow of separation. The lover is going to war or distant place (abroad) leaving his beloved behind. She says goodbye with heavy heart and collapses kissing sand of his footprints and press it to her heart.

*Ear rings are worn* (by a young lady)  
*kani kante pae hoi ne*

*Buttons are better than us*  
*Sade nalon button changay*

*which are close to your body*  
*Jehrey hik nal lai hoe ne*

These lines express unfulfilled desire of lover to get close to his beloved and feel that buttons of her shirt are better than him as these are closer to her body than him. There were lot of restrictions on freedom of love
during the feudal period. One of the characteristic of the folk poetry of Punjab is that it expresses the unfulfilled desires and dreams of people.

**Theme: Praise of lover/beloved**

*My beloved is four cornered lamp*  
*Mera yar chomukhia diva*

*Like the full moon of fourteenth night*  
*Chodhvin de chan varga*

In this poem beloved describe that her lover is as handsome as four cornered lamp which is comparable to the moon of fourteenth night. One of the highlighting characteristics of folk poetry of Punjab is that symbols used in it are very simple but very subtle. Here fourteenth night symbol is used for describing handsomeness of lover though full moon is on fifteenth night. Folk poets used this symbol because on fifteenth night the moon will start decreasing just after appearing whereas on fourteenth night it is almost full in size and has further scope to get completed. This shows the wisdom and minute thinking of folk people while choosing the (positive) symbols.

*Scent like a field of mustard*  
*Ave vashna sarhon de phul vargee*

*Anoints you, fair skinned women*  
*Rane terey gore rang chon*

Here the lover compares the beauty of his fair skinned beloved with the fragrance of mustard flower.

Another salient feature of punjabi poetry, as reflected in above two poems, is that it transcend the boundaries of self and praise the other counterpart. This becomes the basis of warm relations among individuals and sections of the society. This tendency of folk poetry is similar to the Sufi poet Bulle Shah when he says:

"Ranjha Ranjha kardi ne mein ape Ranjha hoi,

sado ne mainu dhedo Ranjha Heer na akho koi."
Here the sufi poet wish to merge his existence with his lover (God) and uses symbol of popular Punjabi folk tale of Heer and Ranjha. Where he depicte himself as Heer (beloved) and God as Ranjha (lover). Most of the Punjabi poetry tends to make dialogue with the self but praise the others while tracing the identity for self.

Here is another poem in which physical beauty of a woman is appreciated:

**The woman came out of pond**

Rann naha ke chhapar vichon nikli

**Like a flame appearing out of an opium pipe.**

Sulfe di laat vargi

In rural Punjab women used to gather on the pond for washing clothes and taking bath etc. These ponds were situated on the outskirt of the villages where cattle's also drank water and took bath. In this poem woman is described coming out of pond, her clothes dripping, her body gleaming in the sun. She is compared to the flame of sadhu's opium pipe. In earlier period sadhus also used to sit around these the village water bodies, ponds for meditation and consume opium etc through pipe which enabled them to concentrate. Here the word 'rann' used for women has a very distinct meaning. This word is used in folk terms when the physical beauty of a women is to be appreciated.

**The beauty of maiden**

Like the crimson of rising dawn

Din charde di lali roop kuari da

Here beauty of an unmarried girl is compared to the emerging redness of the light of rising sun.

**Theme: Heroism Action**

There is a lot of folk poetry written in praise of heroic actions of pro people bandits like 'Jagga' and 'Jeona Mour'. This concept is comparable to Robin Hood of English literature. Similarly a number of poems are available on Dulla Batti a Rajput who threatened the authority of Mughal emperor Akbar for his self respect. See the following poems on bandits.
They clashed on cemented bridge
And nails of their hatchets (weapon) broke

This poem describes the scene of bandits who is running after looting the rich person and is followed by police and a clash take place at a bridge. Similar situation is explained in the following poem about Jeona Mour.

A saw! A saw! A saw! (tune)
The carvan is on bridge
Jeona Mour lets out roar...
Running Jeona
Break the lock of safe
He counts the contents
Just as if he has sold the prized bull
Theme: War

These poems express the feelings of women of Punjab whose husbands went to far away places during British period for (world) war. A very sizeable proportion of young Punjabi people used to join army or go abroad for earning livelihood leaving behind their women. Following poems on this theme express very deep feelings of women folk:

Let your kids die o! britisher  
Tere maran firangia bachey

You initiate war everyday  
Nit din laam cherdan

She cried in excuse of the smoke of fire  
Ohley baith ke dhuein de paj roi

As her lover has gone to war  
Mahi mera laam nu gia

Struck off the name O! britisher  
Kat de firangia nawan

My mother- in- law has the only son  
Eko put meri sas da

Theme: Mother’s Love

I plant hundred of trees  
Mein sao sao rukh pai lanwan

These trees are lush green  
Rukh tan hare bhare

Mothers are cool shadows  
Mavan thandian chhavan

Who will give such shadows?  
Chhavan kaun kare?
Comparison of shadow of trees is compared to shelter that mother gives can not be replaced with.

**Theme: Preference of male child**

In Punjab no song is sung on the birth of girl. Contrarily in rural areas women used to make loud clamor with kitchen utensils (a metaphor for sign of domestic conflict) to sound birth of girl. In the folk poetry strong desire is expressed for male heir. Mothers and sisters sing songs and lullabies only for male child.

Swing and things, sugar puddings

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Hoote mate, khand kheer khete
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Make the cart of gold

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Sone di gad ghara de...
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On it put silver grill

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Roope pinj pawa de
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Seat kaka(son) on top

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Ute kake nu Bithade
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\textit{Alar balar (tune) for bawa(son)}

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Alar balar bawe da
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\textit{Bawa will brought wheat}

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Bawa kanak liavega
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\textit{Bawi will clean it}

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Bawi behke chatagi
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\textit{Bawa will get it grinded}

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Bawa kanak pihevaga
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\textit{Bawi will make loaf of it}

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Bawi mann pakavegi
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\textit{Bawa will take it}

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Bawa behke khavegi
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And

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O! God please give me one brother
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Ek veer dein ve rabba
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Above two poems are Lullabies sung for son & third one is folk poem which express desire of sister for brother. Naths, Jogies and Monks have a very important place in Punjab's folk life and it is reflected in folk poetry also. These Naths and Jogies resided in a place just outside habitation of villages known as Tilas or Deras. In Punjab, people have a great respect for such Monks or Sadhus and give them food or offerings when they arrived on their doors. Following poem describe such feelings:

*Never offer als with covered face to Sadhus.*

*Ghund kad ke khair na paea*

*They are just like God.*

*Sadshu hunde Rab varge*

But on the other hand there is no respect for those who are not real Sadhus and are duplicate and just dressed in yellow garments of Monk. Such Monks are treated in the following way:

*Where are you running away O! stupid monk*  

*Kithey chaleain bubney sadha*

*After disturbing the nest of hornets?*  

*Cher ke bharind rangian*

In these lines hornets means village women or girls.

As most of this poetry is written during the feudal or pre feudal period therefore it mainly represents the sentiments of established elite class of that time and it rarely express the feelings of underprivileged & deprived sections of the society. See the following examples:
In these poems the sons and daughters of landlords are glorified whereas lower classes/ castes are presented just in joking form.

Seldom these poems express the agony & pain of deprived sections of society as mentioned in following lines:

_O! my ladies fellow-friends_   
_Sakhio sawan garjea_

_Clouds are thundering in the monsoon month._   
_Mera thar thar kambia jee_

_But he who neither have the heap of grain nor seed to sow_   
_oh! sawan nu kee kare_

_Has nothing to do with thundering clouds._   
_Jis ghar bohal na bi_
one main characteristic of Punjabi folk poetry is that it describes the nature in a very attractive & beautiful way. As mentioned earlier historically Punjab was a very rich area in terms of diversity of land, seasons, climate, crops and vegetation and other kinds of bio diversity which is reflected in number of folk poems.

**Theme Nature & bio-diversity**

*O! The Earth, fond of love*  
*Dhartia piar karendie*

*There is a lyrical song among songs*  
*Shandan vichon shand*

*The seasons are making thread*  
*Dah sooraj da charkhera*

*On the spinning wheel of sun.*  
*Rutan kadhan tand*

*O! The Earth, fond of love*  
*Dhartia piar karendie*

*Your brow shines with light*  
*Tera matha noor -o -noor*

*The generous sun on your head*  
*sir te sabhar sohanda*

*And your skirt is lush green*  
*Ghagra hara kachoor*

*The peacock is singing somewhere*  
*kitey hare hare bagan vicho*

*in the green gardens*  
*Mor bole*

*It appears to me as if*  
*Saio samjee main kitay*
My lover is singing
Mera dhol bholay

The Pipal tree is singing, the Bohar tree is singing
Pipal gavey Bohar gavey

Singing is the tree of toot
Gavey hariola Toot

Listen them quietly o! traveller
kharke sun rahia

Your soul will become pure
Teri rooh hojoogi soot

Though the trees can’t speak
Rukh bol na sakde bhanwain

But they enquire about the pain of people.
Bandean da haal puchdey

There are long and tall trees of Tahlees
Uchian lamian Tahlian

And among them there is a swing of gujree O! dear.
vich Gujree dee piengh ve!
mahia

Fly O! titar! fly O! peacock
Udeen ve titra udeen ve mora

Fly O! black crow
Udeen ve kalea kaanvan

Give first message to my parents
Pehla suneha mere mapean nu denvien

And second to my brothers & sisters
Dooja bhen bharawan

Give third one to my Pipals
Teeja suneha mere Piplan nu denvien

Where I used to put swings
Jithey mein pingan panvan
Theme: Secular tradition

Punjab has a composite culture where people of various religions and faiths live together. They respect not only their own but other religious faiths also. Look at the following lines which depict composite culture, communal harmony and co-existence of plural identities.

I offer the goat to the Haider Sheik (pir) Haider sheikh da devan bakra
And go there bare foot Nange pairi jawan
I give the wheat bread to Hanumana Hanuman di devan manni
Without any discrimination Rati farak na panwan
I offer sweet (parsad) to the Devi Devi di mein karan kadahi
And I worship all the pir & faquires. Pir faquire dhiavan

OR

Allah, waheguru, khuda is one and the same Alah waheguru, khuda da na Ek hai
People are just confused uselessly. Bherman ch pai gai dunia

Lot of Punjabi folk poetry is composed about the farmers social life. In Punjab there are three main farming communities i.e. Jat, Kamboj & Sainis. But here farmers are popularly referred as Jat, a dominant peasant tribe. Few poems are quoted below which reflect on peasants problems:
O! the farmer, your life is a hell
You have to go to gather fodder
After tilling the land

Plough & other instruments
have been auctioned
And seed has been sold
Still land revenue is pending
What is the benefit of farming.

The money lenders have created an anarchy
All the farmers have been trapped into debt
The farmer is feeling proudy on looking full crop in field
Still there are so many storms & hailstorms.
Be sure only when grains arrive at your home.
Pure white sheets are worn on though Land is mortgaged
Look at youth of this land.
Theme: Gidha Dance - Poem

Brown brown wheat of doaba* Baggi baggi kank doabe dee
The lady who won’t dance Jehri gidha na pave
Would be treated as wife of an old man. Rann babe dee

Gidha is folk dance of women of Punjab. Folk poetry they used in it is known as bolies i.e exchange of words. A women or a group of women play the role of male & others female to express their feelings.

Theme: Groom’s departure on her marriage

As mentioned earlier there is hardly any song composed for the birth of girl but there are number of songs available for her marriage time. The most touching songs are sung at the time of the departure of the groom.

O! My mother the field of wheat Mai kankan da khet
Has grown up slowly and slowly Haoli haoli nisar gia
The country of the father Babal dharmi da des
has been left slowly and slowly. Haoli haoli visar gia

We are a group of sparrows Sada chirian da cheamba ve
O! Father we’ll fly away Babul asan ud jana
We’ll fly too far Sadi lami udari ve
We are unaware which country Babul kehde des jana
We’ll shall land

*O!* mom wheat plants are growing long,  *kankan lamian dhian kion jamian ne mai*

Why daughters are born.  *kankan nisrian dhin kion visrian mai*

Wheat plants are matured,

Why the daughters are departured *O!* mom.

**Theme: Change and continuity in life**

*O!* The leaf of Pipal why are you making noise,  *Pipal de patea ve kehi khar khar laia*

You be detached now

, season has come  *Jhar pao puranea ve rut nanvean*

for new ones.  *di aiea*

This poem reveals the universal truth of continuity and change through the symbol of a dry leaf which is making noise with wind. Poet say why are you making noise you pass away now season has come for new leaves.

**Theme: Mortality of life**

You require a piece of land of just three & half hands  *Sadhe teen hath*  
*Dhartee teri*

*O!* man with so much Land.  *Bahuteian jagiran valea*

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Historically Punjab was spread over long distance from Yamuna to Sindh on one hand and from Himalaya to Aravali mountains on the other. Pleasant hilly areas like Chamba, Chail and Simla etc. were part of undivided Punjab having a very rich folk songs. See following examples of pahari folk songs:

**Theme: Pahari folk song**

*The country of chamba is situated*  
*On a high mountain*  
*And every day there is a rain.*  
*There is group of teak trees on right & left*  
*And lines of other trees too.*

*Uche pahaden ch des*  
*Chambe da*  
*Pendi a roj jhari*  
*Sajen te khaben cheelen da jhurmat*  
*Rukhen di pal khadi*

**Theme: Gadi Song**

*Stay tonight O! my dear Gadi Please stay tonight*  
*neither the father in law*  
*Nor mother in law is at home*  
*I am afraid of loneliness O!*  
*I offer you oil and sugar*  
*I offer you Ghee also*  
*I provide you the bed as well as blanket*  
*You sleep in the green garden.*

*Aj di ratin raho Gadia o! meria*  
*Aj di ratin raho ho*  
*Sohra bi ghar nahin sas bi ghar nahin*  
*Kalie jo lagda hai bhao ho!*  
*Tel bi dinia khand bhi dinia*  
*Tarrke jo dinia gheo Ho!*  
*Manja bi dinian khind bi dinia*  
*Tun thandian baggn vich soon HO!*
On the basis of above folk poems we may conclude that punjabi folk poetry has the following main characteristics:

i) Short form of folk poetry known as tappa is the most popular form of peoples poetry.

ii) It gives the complete meaning and idea in these two lines.

iii) Content and expression of idea is more important in these poems and therefore no special instruments are required to sing them. In certain cases women folks normally use domestic utensils, clay pots or double side drum to sing them.

iv) Folk poetry openly portrays human conditions and it reveals naked truth.

v) It rarely challenges the established social order. In most of the cases this poetry strengthen the established (caste/class)order of society.

vi) Major part of this poetry represents rural sentiments & symbols.

vii) Beauty and aesthetic of nature have been described in a very meaningful and attractive form in this poetry.

To sum up culture is born among common masses in thousand years through their interaction with nature and folk poetry is the earliest form which document culture in an oral form. Culture is a way of coping with challenges of living. Punjab has been a passage to all invaders who invaded India from Central Asia for
centuries. Therefore historically it has gone through the process of construction-destruction-reconstruction for centuries. Here life cycle has always been disrupted and discontinued time and again. There is a popular saying in Punjab "Khada peeda lahe da baki ahamad shehe da" which means whatever you have eaten or drunk is yours, rest belongs to Ahamed Shah (Abdali), the frequent invader to India. Therefore, unlike South India where art forms such as classical dance, rock cut temples and sculptures etc. have been preserved, Punjab could mainly preserve folk forms such as folk dancing, folk music, folk art, folk poems... The folk culture and folk poetry may be treated as the fifth veda of Folk Wisdom of this land of five rivers.

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