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## **Aesthetics of Sublime and the Poetry of Charu Sheel Singh**

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**Abstract:** Charu Sheel Singh as an Indian English Poet is remarkable owing to his attempt of reviving Puranic and Upanishadic tradition. He justifies the statement of Mathew Arnold that the subject matter of poetry must be serious and elevated. The paper proposes to highlight sublime exuberance in the poetry of Charu Sheel Singh that thrives from the legends, Vedic and Puranic mythologies, eastern and western philosophies, occultism and Buddhism. The potential seed of poetry that is within the poet grows in the eternal geography. The textual texture knitted into sublime thought exhibits immanence of God on denotative, connotative and mythical level. In his poetic volumes he expresses the mystic experiences by entering into the zero degree ambience. He tries to understand creation and destruction as ongoing process on the basis of his volatile imagination. In delineating the textural body he sounds like a new historicist and deconstructionist to bring into being different perspectives of history, legend, culture and myth. The paper will make an attempt to analyse C S Singh's historical, comparative and analytical approaches that he uses to establish his poetic consciousness. His handling of philosophy and post-modernist idiom together is noteworthy.

**Keywords:** Upanishadic Consciousness, Mysticism, Buddhism, Comparative Philosophy, Religion and Literature

The five thousand years old tradition of Indian poetry has been transcendental in nature and in contemporary scenario, an Indian English poet Charu Sheel Singh has regenerated Puranic and Upanishadic tradition in his poetic narrations. His groundbreaking twelve collections of poems in English entitled: *Tapascharnam: Sukadeva Ki Pida* (1987), *Songs of Life and Death* (1989), *The Indian Hero* (1993), *Creation*

*Cocktail* (1997) *Terracotta Flames* (2003), *Scripture on Stone* (2007), *Etching on the Edge* (2007), *Kashi: A Mandala Poem* (2007) , *Golden Chariots* (2008), *Born Across Millenniums Incarnations of Vishnu* (2011) and *Ten Mahavidyas* (2015) are laced with trans-temporal features. C.S. Singh's mythopoeic imagination, his method to connect orient and occident, his scriptural consciousness, the rare combination of psychic and mystic inspiration and his experiences weaved in the binary oppositions make us realize a unique and true Indian sensibility in his poetry. The creative and critical faculty of Prof. Singh creates a 'native' model of writing that can parallel western poets like Yeats and Eliot. His works have grown from different sources like Indian epistemology, philosophy, comparative religion, literary theory and comparative aesthetics. Prof. Singh has at his command wide range of knowledge such as current schools of thought, eastern-western philosophies, occultism, Buddhism etc. The characters, legends, Vedic or Puranic mythology are melted into the poet's vision and are delivered into textual body woven into lineaments of figuration. C. S. Singh's excellence is not only in employing the tradition and in giving different dimensions of it but he is also well aware of the fallibilities of written discourses, therefore, like a new historicist he represents history, culture, legends and myths from different angles and from established perspective to depict the truth. In narrative mode and postmodernist idiom, he has depicted cultural specialities and historical events.

C. S. Singh's poetry carries the mystical imagination that is also mythical and image centred. The potential seed of poetry which is within the poet grows in the eternal geography. The textual texture totally knitted into sublime thought exhibits immanence of God on the denotative, connotative and mythical level. The subliminal imagination of the poet invokes striking images and symbols that take us to the culmination of the poet's cosmic experiences. The continuous exploration of mythical, mystical, historical and philosophic consciousness and cultural landscape establish poet's permanent relationship to almighty and to the qualified readers, his poems provide an opportunity to have a glimpse of sublime exuberance in abundance. The Indian aesthetic tradition has been developed out of meditation of Rishis and Munis and they confirm the idea that words are an emanation of God. Sadhna, manan and spiritual vision is the basic modality of C. S. Singh's poetic sensibility which has the power to disrupt the giant flow of bizarre

tradition of Ezekiel and others. The basic features of his poem is a search for god, universalism and establishment of trans-temporality.

C. S. Singh created a new theoretical paradigm known as *mandala* theory. For a better understanding of his poetry one must have knowledge of it. This theory is a unique combination of a poet's innovative and renovative ideas. Its newness exceeds to deconstruction as concentric imagination works through layers of deconstruction but finally, it completes the circle. The concept is revived in terms of regenerating the old Indian concepts and philosophy. *Mandala* of C. S. Singh is possible with the achievement of *maha-samadhi* i.e. highest concentration. Poetry sprouts not from ordinary sources but from the depth of knowledge which exists on the super mental level of consciousness. C. S. Singh did categorization of consciousness into nine stages. The assimilation of all into one becomes *Virat* and it is possible in the stage of highest concentration only. It is in this stage *Bodhisattva* emerges, the world we experience is a mental construct and nothing has inherent existence. The journey of the poet into different layers of imagination finally, depicts the stored thought on the level of sublime and thus, a poet structuralizes these ideas as par his excellence. But the images, symbols and structure of such poets differ from common structure and common language. The length of poetic sentences denotes the long meditative breath of the poet.

The epical form of poetry is considered as the best expression of a poet. C. S. Singh likes a visionary aim at the composition of poetry on an epical scale. He is involved in search of the complete poem therefore, he writes mega epic by combining the five long books of poetry on the single line theme of the quest of liberation. *Mandala* provides a paradigm of various poetry and ultimately leads to the *Nirvana*. In one of his interviews, C. S. Singh stated about his poetry and critical theory: "My poetry is all the time trying to locate centricities that are their own peripheries too. I am seeking an idiom that first radicalizes human existence to the brink of non-existence and then transforms it to the point of its contact with eternity. My critical endeavours are doing the same exercise" (*PPF* 276).

*Tapascharanam* (1986) is the recording of poet's mystic experiences and of his high imaginative entrance in non- conceptual realm wherein he finds the possibility of all kinds of potentialities. *Tapascharanam* is divided into nine chapters and contains 108 poems which have numerological significance. The nine chapters are nine

stages (charnam) of austerity (Tapsya) for an individual soul to meet the God. Nine is a very auspicious and pious digit. It has different connotations. Nine stands for nine planets, nine goddesses, nine gates of the body and so on. Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavadgita* delivering the message to Arjuna about the enlightened self says "the embodied(soul), who has controlled his nature having renounced all action by the mind (inwardly) dwells at ease in the city of nine gates neither working nor causing work to be done" (chap v verse no 13, 208 ). The soul which achieves mastery over nine gates is situated in the centre to observe the glory of nature. The message of eternity and the process of enlightenment present in *Tapascharnam* are not less in degree than the *Bhagavadgita* and other scriptures. The grand design of *Tapascharnam* gradually unrolls different layers of consciousness. In the entire collection, the poet portrays *dukha* as the necessary condition of existence and source of unification of man with God. In the beginning of the poem he invokes to the God and prays to bless him for portraying mystical experiences in the textual form:

In the bosom of waters  
from the cosmic egg,  
let the pearl take lineaments  
of figurative texture  
woven into the morphology of texts ( T1).

Poet completely surrenders himself in front of God and wishes to compose a song in his glory. The image of individual soul carries the agony and he feels caged in heaps of mud realizes the stir within that makes him divine seeker. C. S. Singh's devotional approach is close to Mira, Kabir, Dadu, and Nanak. The projection of images and symbols show the transportation of the soul and the urge to merge completely in the cosmic soul. He writes: "God come and make me/thy companion soul" ( T3).

*Songs of Life and Death* is a collection of fifty prose poems in the *Upnishadic* vein. The songs of the collection carry the painful cry of a soul caught in the bodily form and it reminds of Buddhism. Life and death is a perennial theme and hero of the poem is full of the quest as again and again dream of eternity is shattered:

My life enfolds sadness as morning dew multiplying  
beauteous designs of petals to form an evening song. Is  
there someone to lit a lamp of the night before a crazy world  
on a sunny day all along? (SLF81)

Poet views that the ruptured, narrow and selfish existence is self-defeating and it is like cancer. The universe is total and totality has a centrality. Recognition of the centre of the infinite circle becomes possible with self-awareness. But man is a slave of his own flesh, wish and desire. He is caught in the systematic web of *Maya*. Poet emphasizes that to become a *Bodhichitta* i.e. self-realization the bi-focal vision is needed. The bi-focal vision is located into the centricity of one's own which has its peripheries too:

The huge infinite circle is not without a centre. Would the ignorant spider weave the circumstantial evidence of places infected with cancer?

The interior spaces of the *mandala* have gone deep inside into the crucified bi-focal vision to become a *Bodhichitta*

The Upanishadic texts are merged into the arteries of a sleeping global Man while the deep rivers infinite flow indefinitely to the destinations not yet known (*SLF*81).

Poet laments the loss of *Upanishadic* texture in human beings. The greatest philosophy and equilibrium of life is marvellously structured in the *Upanishads*. In the sinews and bones of everyone current of *Upanishadic* consciousness is running but it is in silent sleeping mode. The global man is in the state of complete inertia; the power to illumine the self is inactive. Unless man realizes his purpose of life, he is like vagabond wandering aimlessly.

In the poem, there is a continuous expansion of the self yet there is something that limits the infinite. The cyclicity continues and soul moves in the destined circle. Death is not a miserable aspect of life rather it is ultimate power which has the greatest liberating force. There is life after death and death after life and so on. The paradoxical songs look for the creation of such spiral gyre that can bring the apocalypse. The apocalypse raises the possibility of meeting with the ultimate. In the whole poem, poet has drawn data from history, mythology, philosophy, literature and Christianity. C. S. Singh integrates Indian thought with that of Biblical occurrences.

*The Indian Hero* (1993) is the representative volume of C.S. Singh in which he revives *Puranic* and *Upanishadic* myths. India's mystic past is framed with the contemporary reality of both in the east and the west. The hero is a cosmic being who is beyond temporality and reflects the character of Krishna. Krishna as an earthly hero is superior to heavenly

wrathful Indra who is sitting aloof in his heaven. Indra is far away from the human predicament that groans under his wrath:

This wrath made  
Indra ruin the Virgin  
land by rain and thunder  
but *Krishna's* wrath  
was that of a  
Saviour which saved  
the land by raising  
Govardhana in the  
mind and soul of  
the living beings (*IH* 117).

Krishna is the assimilation of many heroes and the climax of Indian culture. Krishna narrated the infinite and the unravelling of the text named Krishna can only produce such *Indian Hero*. C. S. Singh's hero is an amalgam of the myriad current of thought, civilization and culture. The hero tries to establish a new civilization along with the old tradition. The sensibility of the hero is completely woven with the mythical thread.

The hero borns many times and dies many times. He performs both creative and destructive action. The hero is within everyone yet the thin layer of illusion prohibits a man from rending the curtain between man and his heroism:

He is  
himself. In himself,  
he grows, is born  
& succumbs to temporal  
injuries (*IH* 132).

The attempt of the hero is always to create a world which resembles or holds the identity of God. But the success is never gained thus, in the whole poem struggle continues. The action of the poem is concentrated over what the hero thinks feels and does. Through his hero, C. S. Singh uniquely created a new order of life, sensibility and culture by merging the best of an old and new tradition. Eliot has significantly observed that literature as a whole has a common thread hence no artist can express his meaning in isolation. Present work of art can be compared and contrasted with the works of the past to know its worth. Any idea expressed in a work of art has to confirm with the idea already existing in the literary tradition. He says the poet must be quite aware of the fact that "Art never improves, but that the material of art is

never quite the same" (*TIT* 295). Eliot views that every literary artist works out the same concepts. All in all basics of art never changes what changes is the language, style and context. For instance, Aurobindo, Tagore, C S Singh and others have expressed the scriptural idea in their own manner at different time periods. Thus, they conform with the tradition and relive the past in their respective works.

*Creation Cocktail* (1997) is a long narrative poem and full of multi-layered mysticism. He includes various myths and legends and with his imagination, he measures the rhythm of *Vedic* mantras. Poet constantly moves between visibility and invisibility. As in *Rig Veda*, it is stated that only three fourth of *Adi Purush* is visible rest is un-manifested therefore, it remains invisible. Creation is not monolithic in the structure; it is like a cocktail. The chief mythical character of the poem is earth who is a woman. The creation is an unconscious act. The state before the evolution of earthly existence has semblance with the unknown, the mysterious being. Poet writes that there was nothing except empty space before anything was created. The empty space had not shape, size, colour and texture. It was indefinable. *Brahma*, the Supreme Being created the earth and filled it with a sea of desires. The earth becomes pregnant with many ideas. It conceives a human world of love, adventure and other sports of cruelty. The endless process of birth and death is itself mystical like the evolution of earth and it also symbolizes cyclicity. The opening lines are:

Petrified silence grew  
into directional depths of  
hemispheres percolating the  
being of an empty space.  
There is a point of Destiny  
at the Centr call'd  
*bindu* that cuts across  
the enveloping dark  
of a weeping Earth  
who is a woman too  
waiting to be a mother. (139)

The emergence of *bindu* made the space abstract otherwise space and time were only imagination. The *bindu* is a cosmic code that is responsible for the genesis of the human world. The earth is weeping in the moment of creation because the world is full of atrocities where she is going to deliver a new generation. The mother expectation is



saddened out of a chaotic situation. Poet establishes the idea that earth fights an unknown battle and she also succeeds. The collection emphasizes that after every creation there will be destroyed and that destruction leads back to creation again. Whenever the effort is made to resolve the major questions of creation and de-creation the one conclusion comes *Ekoham Bhaushyami* i.e. the one God derives pleasure in manifesting himself into many. The eternity persists even in the minimal objects. The volatile imagination of C.S. Singh time and again celebrates the fissures to understand the scheme of God's creation.

C. S. Singh's approach is historical, comparative and analytical and he establishes a relationship between one and another movement. In his writing, he postulates eastern culture, philosophy and tradition as a model for western thinkers. He constitutes new terminology and idiom out of Indian epistemology, philosophy, tantric literature and from other literary sources. In the postmodernist idiom, he evolves a new poetic genre which sustains sublimity in the poetry which is the very essence of Indianness. On the whole, he succeeds in projecting true Indianness which has been suspected, deleted and declared obsolete in Indian poetic tradition after Sri Aurobindo and Tagore.

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