

Indian Poetry in English
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Lecture - 29
Charu Sheel Singh

Good morning friends and welcome back to NPTEL online certification course on Indian Poetry in English. My dear friends, you might well remember at present we are discussing impressionistic poetry in Indian poetry in English. And in this regard the former lecture that we did was on Niranjan Mohanty, a meditative voice of Indian English poetry.

Today we are also going to talk about one more a meditative voice who actually tries to bring his readers aware of the fact that Indian English poetry is rich not only because of the present day happenings, but also because of its rich culture. And this voice is none other than the voice of Charu Sheel Singh. Dear friends, it has actually been a tragedy that there are many such voices which do not get the attention of the critics and the scholars especially in the field of Indian poetry in English.

But my reading of Indian poetry in English and especially those of some contemporary poets who did not get or who could not get the attention that they deserved, I thought I should take up and analyse the poetic world of some such voices. And in this regard, the voice of late Charu Sheel Singh is of course, very major and we shall discuss Charu Sheel's poetry today.

But before we go on to delve deep into the world of Charu Sheel's poetry, let me give you a brief description about who Charu Sheel Singh was and how he became a poet. Because it is always said that poets often get their voices in the very prime of their lives.

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Socio-Political Conditions

- Age of decadence and helplessness
- People losing faith in themselves
- Ethically desiccated world of social ills
- Religious Chicanery


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And of course, the socio-political conditions also play a major role we all remember the fact that after the World War II the entire world witnessed a sort of decadence and helplessness. Actually, there was a sort of fragmentation as many of you are aware of the poetry of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound and others. In Indian English scenario also we could see this happening we could find around ourselves an ethically desiccated world of social ills and a religion which had always been a strengthening force. Some way or the other actually got to be relegated. But here is our poet who is so steeped, who is so rooted in Indian customs Indian traditions, Indian religious practices that he actually wants a sort of recovery of faith.

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Introduction

- Born in 1955, Farrukhabad, U. P
- Ph.D from Varanasi on the poetry of William Blake
- Post-doctorate from University of Warwick in 1982.
- Professor at Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi
- Influenced by Adi Shankaracharya, Buddha, Swami Vivekananda and Ram Tirtha
- Transcendental Poet belonging to the genre of philosophical poetry
- Mandala Literary Theory, steeped in Indian ethos
- 'Poet is the critic and critic is the poet'



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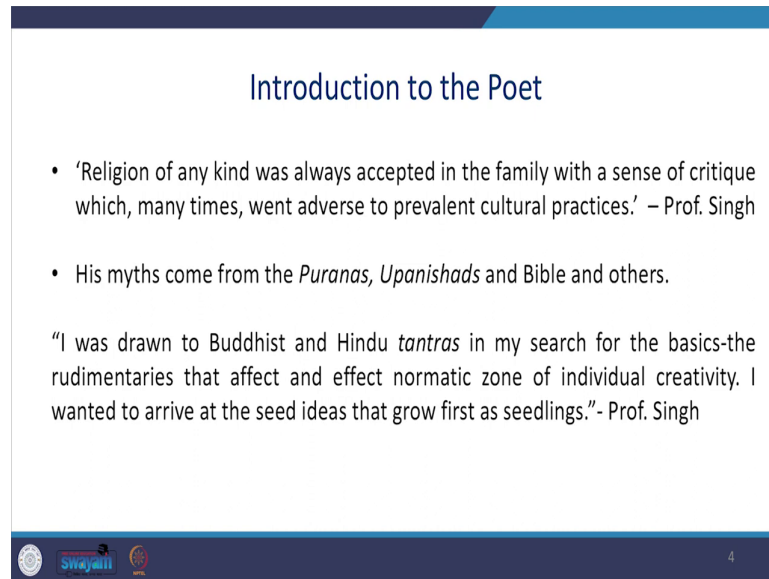
So, this poet Charu Sheel Singh was born in 1955 in Farrukhabad district of Uttar Pradesh, India. He did his Ph.D from Varanasi on the poetry of William Blake and later on he also converted it in the form of a book. He also got the opportunity of doing his post doctorate from the University of Warwick, England in 1982.

This poet was a professor and professor of English at Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi. So, when one reads the poems of Charu Sheel Singh, one finds Varanasi getting personified everywhere Varanasi getting depicted in all forms and the religious practices that Varanasi is so proud of and can boast of.

We can find the details of those in his poems. It actually reminds me of how once he wrote one poem entitled; I mean, a collection entitled *Kashi: A Mandala Poem*. That is actually a narrative and he talks about Kashi in details. Of course, the poet uses his fertile imagination because the poet right from his early years was influenced by Vivekananda, Ram Tirtha, Adi Shankaracharya, Buddha and many others. Charu Sheel can be considered to be a traditional poet who belongs to the genre of philosophical poetry.

It is actually in his blood that philosophy, religion, comparative literature-- all these actually got or infused in him a different sort of inspiration. Charu Sheel is not only a poet, but a critic and a scholar of, you know, he is steeped in Indian ethos. Once he said that, "the poet is the critic and critique is the poet".


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Introduction to the Poet

- ‘Religion of any kind was always accepted in the family with a sense of critique which, many times, went adverse to prevalent cultural practices.’ – Prof. Singh
- His myths come from the *Puranas*, *Upanishads* and Bible and others.

“I was drawn to Buddhist and Hindu *tantras* in my search for the basics-the rudimentaries that affect and effect normatic zone of individual creativity. I wanted to arrive at the seed ideas that grow first as seedlings.” - Prof. Singh

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Now, is not it quite becoming that we must know who this poet is and how he became a poet. Because when he was only at the age of 20, he had started writing poetry. As regards his deep religiosity, because many people still consider Charu Sheel as a poet who is so steeped in learning, that his poetry at times appears to be very difficult. Many people have also gone to the extent of calling him very pedantic.

But then Professor Singh used to say religion of any kind was always accepted in the family because he got it as a legacy. With a sense of critique which many times went adverse to prevalent cultural practices.

He also says that “I was drawn to Buddhist and Hindu *tantras* in my search for the basics the rudimentaries that affect an effect normative zone of individual creativity. I wanted to arrive at the seed ideas that grow first as seedlings.” So, this is how Charu Sheel himself thinks about Indian tradition because we believe that Charu Sheel is a poet of Indian tradition.

So, majority of his narratives that he has written one can find the element of religion very dominant. So, he can be considered to be a poet who actually wants to make his readers aware of India’s rich cultural and scriptural values. There is a sort of spiritual quest in his world because Charu Sheel believes that poetry is a sort of penance, it is actually a form of prayer.


And through poetry one can have a sort of peregrination of the soul, the inner journey; the inner journey one can also come across the binaries of life having gruesome realities. Poetry is not only titillating, poetry is also about educating human beings.




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The Poet and his Works

- Spiritual quest
- Poetry as penance, a form of prayer
- Peregrination of the soul
- Binaries of life having gruesome realities
- Imagination plays on mythological characters
- Reviving the tropes left by our ancient heroes
- Awaken the blunted sensibilities of humans

- *Tapascharnam* (1981)
- *Songs of Life and Death* (1989)
- *The Indian Hero* (1993)
- *Creation Cocktail* (1997)
- *Terracotta Flames* (2003)
- *Kashi : A Mandala Poem* (2007)
- *Scriptures on Stone* (2007)
- *Etching on Edge* (2007)
- *Golden Chariots* (2008)
- *Legacies* (2010)
- *Collected Poems :1975- 2003*(2008)
- *Born Across Milleniums* (2011)
- *Ten Mahavidyas* (2016)






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And of course, imagination plays a major role in poetry, but at the same time it is through imagination and through reviving the tropes which we have almost left or which have been left by our ancient heroes. The rich legacy that we have some way or the other relegated or are left behind. So, there is actually a sense of awakening the blunted sensibilities of human in the world of the poetic world of Charu Sheel. So, Charu Sheel has to his credit so many poetry collections.

Because as I mentioned earlier that he was not only a poet, but he was also a critic and he developed this Mandala theory. So, the very first book that Charu Sheel composed was *Tapascharnam*. It is said that when he was only in his 20s he had started writing or composing the songs of *Tapascharnam* which was later translated by none other than his father into English. And when he translated it he called it *Tapascharnam:Sukdev ki pira* that is actually the Hindi translation, but English version of *Tapascharnam* which was written in the original is available.

Many of the readers of Charu Sheel will come to know a lot about Indian scriptures, Indian religious traditions and also the major celebrities of Indian, you know, ancient culture through having a reading of Charu Sheel's work. Then came *Songs of Life and Death* in the year in

1989, then followed by *The Indian Hero* in 1993, then *Creation Cocktail*. Charu Sheel was not such a poet who used to write every now and then, but then he really took time because much of his poetry is full of thoughts, full of ponderings and that is why he took a lot of time.

They are in a way a major source of learning because one can find the elements of mythological characters, mythological stories and that can help readers to look beyond what the poet says. And that actually makes Charu Sheel a difficult poet and that is why majority of the anthologists have failed to include his poetry or his poems. But then that does not belittle the importance of being a Charu Sheel a poet. *Scriptures on Stone, Etching on Edge*, then *Golden Chariots* in 2008, then *Legacies* 2010 in 2010. Then *Born Across Millenniums* in 2011 and then *Ten Mahavidyas* in 2016 and finally, he did *Collected Poems* where we can find a collection of his major works from 1975 to 2003. Actually, I am very shocked to tell you that this year only we lost him. The poet that Charu Sheel was, had a long association with the poet and that is why I know much about him, but it would not be possible to throw light on majority of his works.

But then we shall try our level best to familiarise our readers with major works of Charu Sheel. So, let us have a look at *Tapascharnam*--- the very first book *Tapascharnam* was written when the poet was too young. Can one think of a person so dipped in philosophy and religion at such a young stage? And the father I mean Charu Sheel's father was often shocked and surprised at the son delving in the realms of philosophy and religion.

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Tapascharnam

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Nine chapters having 108 songs ❖ A mystic journey from the world of time to eternity ❖ A blend of medieval devotional poetry, yogic and spiritual traditions of the country ❖ Full of images, symbols and compound linguistic phrases ❖ Delineation of Krishna Dwapayen, Ved Vyas and Sukdev 	<p>Drum –beaters accompany the jolly crowd When I ask them what it is they do , They say it is marriage of fool Know something of life's bloom.</p> <p>Dropping my head I think How ignorance on them doth wink They live to marry and marry to die Is this the life o earth and sky?</p> <p>He smiles at children's hollow shows Who play with sand and mud-dunes, Will there be a time I ask When these children shall throw off their mask? (Poem No. 26)</p>
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So, this book *Tapascharnam* has got nine chapters and it has got 108 songs. The moment one goes through these songs one is reminded of Rabindranath Tagore and one is also reminded of Aurobindo. At times I always used to ask him how can we find the essence of Aurobindo in your poems and he used to pass on a very wry smile. So, one can find a mystic journey from the world of time to eternity in *Tapascharnam*. *Tapascharnam* actually is a blend of mediaeval devotional poetry which is yogic and a spiritual traditions of the country.

Tapascharnam is full of images, but then when you read it you will like it because it is written in such a way it may not have a sort of musicality in terms of rhyme and other things. But then once you start reading *Tapascharnam* the songs are so much soaked in thoughts that you would not be able to leave it before you have completed it.

There is a delineation of Krishna Dwapayan, I mean Vedavyas as all of you are familiar with Vedavyas who had written a *Bhagwat Puran*. And it is said that when this book was translated *Tapascharnam* was translated the translator added one more you know phrase *Tapascharnam:Sukdev ki Pira* . And so, in a way it familiarizes us not only with Sukhdev the sort of struggle Sukdev had.

But it is actually the struggle of every human being it is the struggle of a poet. It is always said about Sukdev that Sukdev was the son of Vedavyas. In fact, VedaVyas did not have any son and Sukhdev had to be in his mother's womb for 12 years and he did not want to come out because he was.

So, anxious about the chaos of this mundane world, but finally, the struggle that he underwent in the womb of his mother that actually gave him an opportunity to have a lot of knowledge. We can take some of the poems from *Tapascharnam* in order to see how deeply the poet is influenced by the ancient scriptures and how he goes and how he sings.

At times we can find that there is a philosophy, but this philosophy is not devoid of meaning. It talks about life in a way it also talks about the meaninglessness of human life on this mundane earth. While he says,

“Drum beaters accompany the jolly crowd when I ask them what it is they do they say it is a marriage; it is a marriage of fool know something of life's bloom. Dropping my head, I think how ignorance on them doth wink they live to marry and marry to die, is this the life O earth and sky?

So, the poet asks a very philosophical question they live to marry and marry to die is this the life, O” earth and sky. So, the poet asks a very existential question a very philosophical question that all of us in this mundane world perhaps we simply are here to marry and marry to die. “He smiles at children’s hollow shows who play with sand and mud dunes.”

Now, again the poet rages another philosophical question and says when he says he we actually have we actually can have different interpretations different reference here. “He smiles at children’s hollow shows who play with sand and mud dunes/ will there be a time I ask when the children shall throw off their mask.”

My dear friends, when we use this word mask here in this context this actually is a sort of ostentation, this actually is a sort of cover. And what the poet means to say is that we are living a life which is not of reality, but we are actually following a path where we do not know what is the meaning of life. So, there is a sort of existential crisis which one can find in the work of Charu Sheel Singh. There is a sort of philosophical meandering when he says that “Will there be a time I ask when the children shall throw off their marks”? Even all of us being children, so when we use the word children we actually mean perhaps all of us are ignorant and do not understand the nitty-gritty of our lives. And that is why we continue to live in a world of ostentatious in a world of pomp and show to quote Shakespeare signifying nothing my dear friend fine. And again poem after poem, you can have a such beautiful thoughts.

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Contd...

We are frogs in the muddy pond
living our life without a glimpse of the land
eating the filth and making vain claim
of our sheer nothingness O shame! (Poem No. 31)

For a little piece of bread
I rove from door to door
In the hideous silence of the night
For stomach’s delight.

The doors of the world are closed
For me to remain unfed.
Indignant dogs bark at the night-thief
To pluck out the remains of my meat. (Poem No. 61)

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“We are frogs in the muddy pond/ living our life without a glimpse of the land/ eating the filth/ and making vain claim of our sheer nothingness O shame.” So, the poet time and again in every, you know, when the stanza comes to an end there is a sort of apostrophe. And the poet says what a sort of life we are living perhaps our life is so confined that we cannot go beyond, we cannot think beyond and we simply are just like frogs in the muddy pond.

You can always find references of animal imagery--- frogs, snakes, varah, figs and all because all these they have been taken from our ancient scriptures and all these have got some sort of incarnation some sort of disguise. And the poet often asks a question: For a little piece of bread/ I rove from door to door/ in the hideous silence of the night/ for stomach’s delight.

So, what actually is reality that only for a crumb of bread we are moving here and there and the world and the doors of the world are closed for me to remain unfed I do not find a way out. I mean those who are actually hungry of, those who are thirsty of, those who actually want to quench their desire. And, what sort of desire? So, when I use the word desire actually means a lot—“Indignant dogs bark at the night thief/ to pluck out the remains of my meat.”

So, there is a sort of contrary, even when I get something even when I steal something out of you know out of hunger, even the dogs/ to pluck out the remains of my meat. Whatever I get perhaps I am being deprived of that. So, what a sort of cruel world we are living in, O shame!

So, the time and again the poet asks such a questions and the questions are not devoid of a philosophical interpretations and underpinnings. Then came *Songs of Life and Death* again you can find in majority of the poems of Charu Sheel the same question is being repeated and the question of life, the question of death.

The question of what is permanent, the question of what is immortal, the question of what is ethereal. And we human beings are always crazy after all these temporary pleasures, all these earthly pleasures without knowing that some day or the other this has to come to an end. So, these *Songs of Life and Death* are also the outpourings of an anguished soul a protagonist is seen as a *parivrajak* or a *tathagata*.

And the entire work is full of imagery ranging from, you know, there is a vast range of imagery from history from mythology from philosophy and also from literature. And then the lines that we come across they remind us of a sort of fragmentation, they remind us of a sort

of life that we are living and here when he uses ‘history is a monument of clipped wings’ we are reminded of T. S. Eliot.

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Songs of Life and Death

- Outpourings of an anguished soul
- Protagonist a Parivrajaka or a Tathagata
- A mosaic of imagery ranging from history, mythology, to philosophy and literature

History is a monument of clipped wings and fissured sense for how shall Albion rise again? We are imaginative pastures of land growing upon the iron milk of the tender bosoms of our mothers. Why mothers should be whores every time is not known. Is there someone to tell us and make our lives less forlorn? (p.85)

It is million of years since that flowers have bloomed without the perfume of human desire. It is with finger nails that I dig the ground of my grave to claim it mine. Let all wait for another millennium when I might break my destiny's ground and uncover the evils of my earthly swine . (Poem No. 29)

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The Eliotian echo one can find many many scholars have gone to the extent of calling Charu Sheel as an Indian Eliot. So, history is a monument of clipped wings let us go back to T. S. Eliot’s poem Jeromson where he says, “History is a cunning passage of countrived corridors” fine. So, here Charu Sheel says-

“History is a monument of clipped wings and fissured scents/ for how shall Albion rise again? We are imaginative pastures of land growing upon the iron milk of the tender bosoms of our mothers. Why mothers should be whores every time is not known.” And the poet again puts a question, why mothers should be whores? So, again to this beautiful civilized world he raises a question why should our women be converted into whores and who is responsible for all this.

Is there someone to tell us and make our life make our lives less forlorn can we get these answers to know and to have more of you know our queries being answered why are we left isolated. So, as I have been saying that if you once start reading *Tapascharnam* and *Songs of Life and Death* you can find that they are so much clad in thought, so much wrapped in philosophy that for a common reader it is very difficult to unfold the meanings or unwrap the meanings.

Let us take a poem number 29 from this where he says: “It is million of years since that flowers have bloomed without the perfume of human desire. It is with fingernails that I dig the ground of my grave to claim it mine we are perhaps trying to dig our past. Let all wait for another millennium when I might break my destiny’s ground and uncover the evils of my earthly swine.”

Can we do we ever get the time to think of what we are doing? Do we ever get the time to retreat and claim our rich legacies? Perhaps, not and that is why he says ‘it is million of years since that flowers have bloomed.’ All our beautiful messages and lessons have already been buried in this beautiful earth, in this in all our scriptures, but have we got the time to dig, have we got the time to think, have we got the time to ponder over my dear friend and then came *Indian Hero*.

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The Indian Hero

- ❑ A piece of intellect and intuition
- ❑ A post-modern poem, mixing the sublime with the absurd, myth of creation
- ❑ Depiction of Brahma, Krishna, Buddha and Christ

Arjuna are not born
in assemblies that
tear naked Draupadi’s clothes
they take birth in the jungles
where Dronacharyas
live and take and mould /Destiny. (CP, 110)

In the fertility myths of
kaleidoscopic metaphor
The limbs of the hero
Are scattered all
Over Himalaya and Gangetic
Plains. The hero has
no mother nor father.
He is self-constituted
progeny of his sacred
lineaments. He is
himself. In himself
he grows, is born
and succumbs to temporal
injuries.

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The title of this collection is *Indian Hero* and here he talks about so many Indian heroes who have actually made us proud, but then we are perhaps straying from their paths and have taken a different path. Here in this collection the poet actually refers to Brahma, Krishna, Buddha, Christ and all and then talks about how they could become great. And then in a way he tries not only to familiarise us, but also to civilize us because the younger generation are actually revelling and rejoicing in a different sort and the poet actually wants to recover their faiths.

Of course, *The Indian Hero* is a beautiful piece of intuition and intellect. The poem if you have a look at its structure and at its syntactic structure and linguistic meaning you can find that the poem is a postmodern one, the poet is not untouched, not unaffected by the new current of the postmodern realities. And then he mixes the sublime with the absurd and the myth of creation.

Let us take some lines from that where how the poet also raises questions on history, raises questions of our ancient scriptures. And then there are references to Mahabharata and then the poem poet actually talks about how women were treated and how women have been treated even in the past and what were our civilized people doing.

Are we still not; are we still not repentant? Should we not repent over what happened to Draupadi? And then he says—

“Arjuna’s are not born/ in assemblies that/ tear naked Draupadi’s clothes./ They take birth in the jungles/ where Dronacharya’s live and take and mould destinies.”


So, there is a question on this patriarchal order where why all these people were silent when Draupadi was being maltreated. And that is why the poet says Arjuna’s are not born in assemblies that tear naked Draupadi’s clothes. They take birth in the jungles where Dronacharya’s live and take and mould destiny. So, why have we strayed from our path again. We can take some more lines- “In the fertility myths/ of kaleidoscopic metaphor/ the limbs of the hero/ are scattered all /over Himalaya and Gangetic/ Plains. The hero has no mother no father,/”. Somebody who is hero, somebody who is victorious, somebody who is a saviour he should actually come above all these petty considerations, fine. The hero has no mother, no father, he is self- constituted progeny of its sacred lineaments. “He is himself, in himself he grows,/ in himself he is born/ and he succumbs to temporal energies.”

By saying all this, the poet actually tries even to strengthen the common people that they should not simply sing the glories rather they should also try to imbibe. Because all these people who have been heroes, all these people we revere are actually self- made. Of course, there can be a requirement of a *guru*, but at the same time unless and until the hero has got a self -desire, a self- inspiration, the hero cannot become a hero, my dear friend.

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General Characteristics of Poems

- Regenerates Puranic and Upanishadic tradition
- Psychic and Mystic combination
- Narrative Mode
- Long poems in epical mode
- Rhetorical
- Postmodernist Imagery
- Relives old experiences in a radical way
- 'History is a whore.'
- Existentialism and phenomenology



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So, in a way we find the general characteristics of Charu Sheel's poems are that he from time to time regenerates Puranic and Upanishadic tradition. One can find a blend of psychic and mystic combination the narrative mode is all, but the spontaneously flowing where he says history is a whore. The poet actually puts before us a question as to should we not interrogate our history, why should we simply be proud of it.

We have strayed from our path and the need of the hour is still to recover, to recover our lost paths, to recover our cultural legacies that actually have been pushed towards the margin. There is an element of existential truth and one can also find a sort of phenomenological knowledge preserved in Charu Sheel's poems. Then came *Creation Cocktail* if you have a look at the titles of Charu Sheel's poems, you will find that in every poem because you know he was a actually a scholar of a Blakean tradition. So, there is a lot of symbolism.

Creation Cocktail-- in this beautiful collection, he talks about creation, he talks about birth. And there when he takes us to the world of his own poetic realm, we find how he mentions that how when the earth wanted to create something, the earth had got several questions before. So, this volume is also full of Indian mythological narrative of creation the poet actually posits or opinionates the universe as an outcome of *pralay*. And as an outcome of *pralay* where the earth actually wanted to create.

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Creation Cocktail

- Indian mythological narrative of creation
- The poet posits the universe as an outcome of pralaya
- Delineation of the cosmic process of creation and birth
- Panorama of the earth as a vacuity oscillating between the layers below and spheres above

God is not a territory or a mountain top or even a plateau of conscience which one can go to occasionally for self-pleasure. He writes Bibles of love and breathes death and life into minarets of syllables which are gyrated time sustaining a world that God continually creates and destroys. (P.45)

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And while creating there is actually a delineation or a portrayal of the cosmic process of creation and birth. So, one can find a panorama of the earth as a vacuity. The earth was actually a vacuity which was oscillating between the layers below and the spheres above. Of course, when a poet talks about all these things, the earth having different layers and the poet delving deep in these layers and then trying to find about our scriptural truths. Naturally, his poetry would appear to be very difficult for poetry lovers who simply want to have a sort of readymade enjoyment and entertainment.

And that is why Charu Sheel's poetry is a bit difficult, but then it actually makes us aware, it actually entertains us and it educates us at the same time. Because the way he puts some of the messages wrapped in it, say for example, when he says- "God is not a territory or a mountain top."

Now, there once again first let me read it and then we will come to it—"God is not/ a territory or/ a mountain top/ or even a plateau of/ conscience which/ one can go to occasionally/ for self pleasure." So, now, at times we have been talking of how we Indians often go to offer our prayers in temples, but the poet here raises a question that if you go there occasionally simply to find God, God is not there. "He writes/ Bibles of love/ and/ breathes death and life/ into minarets of/ syllables which are/ gyrated time sustaining/ a world that god/ continually creates and destroys."

So, what is the essence? The essence is that going to the temple and paying or praying or offering which you make once that does not mean that you are having a sort of divine faith or whatsoever. God is every now and then all around us because God writes ‘Bibles of love’ and then there is a reference to it. The way we are fighting against each other fine there are strives. But then does God actually warn that we have already read in the previous lecture how Niranjan Mohanti says that ‘I am bound with karma and dharma.’

So, my dear friends! Indian ethos says that God is every now and then around us. God is omniscient, God is omnipotent, God is omnipresent, my dear friend.

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Etching on the Edge

Good and evil songs distribute
Mornings and evenings into
Bri-collage that never intercede.
The middle is a woman ever trying
To be a man. Krishna is a concentricity
And a communion within and without.
Draupadis are metrical zones that
Cry often for help and shout.

It was Sita who bore
the brunt of banishment
scripting songs gods understood not
And stories time cannot tell.
Devotion annuls differences
Like a cauldron meshing
And burning the dross for the purity
of gold.

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Then came *Etching on the Edge*. *Etching on the Edge* once again you look at the title-- Etching on the Edge. Now, here again, the poet says lots of things and again you can come across the reference of Sita, Draupadi, fine and many more. When he says—“It was Sita who bore/ the brunt of banishment/ scripting songs Gods understood not/ and stories time cannot tell/ devotion annuls differences/ like a cauldron meshing/ and burning the dross for the purity/ of gold.”

So, Sita had to give the *agni pareeksha* all of you know that and then the poet once again asks the question why should Sita give an agni pareeksha? Why there is a different sort of treatment? And the poet says—“Good and evil songs distribute/ mornings and evenings into/ bri-collage that never intercede /the middle is a woman ever trying/ to be a man./Krishna is a

concentricity/ and a communion within and without/ Draupadi's are metrical zones/ that cry often for help and shout.”

So, even in our scriptures the way women have been treated, the poet is not happy with it and the poet actually integrates. And that is why he says there is a sort of a recovery needed. Now, those people who said that Charu Sheel was a poet who was steeped only in religiousness and in mythologies and all perhaps obliterate the fact that Charu Sheel also wrote some poems about love.

But then of course, this love is of a different sort either it is a divine love or when he talks about love then he also raises a question. For example, when he talks about Savitri and when he talks about Draupadi the way he says let us take some lines from *Etching on Edge*.

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Love poems

<p>“Savitri”</p> <p>There is serenity in time shrouded All over into the perfidy of details. Satyavans are stolen monuments and Savitris sparrows of beaming gold. (EOE, 9)</p> <p>One does not win or lose woman in a culture of symbolic forms. Pandavas lost glories to the top giving way to satiric zone of ironic mansion. (EOE, 17)</p>	<p>He had murder'd Millions of Mumtaj's that Could have grown into trillions Of Taj's! Love is not a tattooed locale nor a shivering, calf of empty universalism. It is circulating blood beyond cockney ideas that create a phone which morphemes mortality into a live syntax. Love is an engrossing juncture of being that eternally assimilates the ever-segregated into its tertiary fold of sanguine imagination. (SOS, 54)</p>
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13

And he says—“There is serenity in time shrouded/ all over into the perfidy of details/ Satyavan's are stolen monuments/ and Savitri's sparrows of beaming gold.” We have already read much about Savitri and Satyavan while we were discussing Aurobindo, fine. But then here also a Charu Sheel refers to Satyavan's are stolen monuments, I would rather substitute the word stolen and say winning monuments it is because of the *tapasya* it is because of the penance of Savitri that Satyavan was brought back.

And again when the poet talks about Draupadi, he says—“One does not win/ or lose woman in a culture.” We are so proud of our culture, but should we not remember how we lost

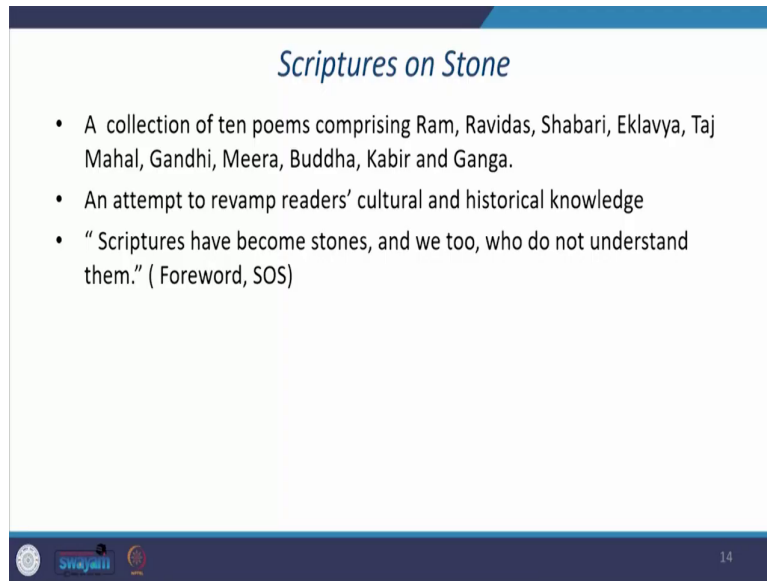
Draupadi only in a game. One does not win or lose woman in a culture of symbolic forms. “Pandava’s lost/ glories to the top giving way to/ satiric zone of ironic mansion.” And then the poet once again puts a question that ‘Is woman a commodity, the question that is being raised every now and then.

So, the poet says that even in our ancient scriptures, this has not been taken seriously. And again while he talks about the immortal love of Mumtaz where and in whose memory the Taj Mahal was created. The poet says and there the poet derides the love of Shah Jahan and says it was not only Shah Jahan’s love, but think about the love of all those people who had actually created, who had actually made that beautiful structure called Taj Mahal.

And the poet says—“He had murdered/ millions of Mumtaz’s that/ could have grown into trillions/ of Tajs.” And he actually he has a sympathy with those labourers who were amputated as you all know. “Love is not/ a tattooed locale nor a/ shivering calf of empty/ universalism it is circulating/ blood beyond cockney ideas/ that create a phone which/ morphemes mortality into/ a life syntax. Love is/ an engrossing juncture of/ being love is an engrossing juncture of/ being that eternally assimilates/ the ever segregated into/ its tertiary fold of sanguine/ imagination.” But then Shah Jahan became great, Mumtaz became immortal because a structure was created.

But, what about the love of all those people who had actually been left, devoid of the company of their own beloveds? Did anyone think about the love of all those lovers? Perhaps not.

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The slide features a title 'Scriptures on Stone' in a blue serif font. Below the title is a bulleted list of three points. The slide has a dark blue header and footer. The footer contains a circular logo on the left, the text 'Swayamii' in the center, and the number '14' on the right.

Scriptures on Stone

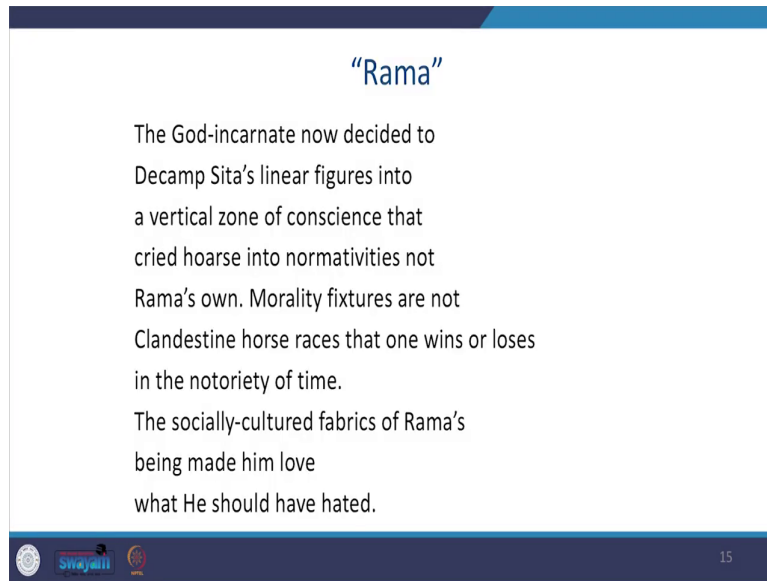
- A collection of ten poems comprising Ram, Ravidas, Shabari, Eklavya, Taj Mahal, Gandhi, Meera, Buddha, Kabir and Ganga.
- An attempt to revamp readers' cultural and historical knowledge
- " Scriptures have become stones, and we too, who do not understand them." (Foreword, SOS)

Then came the *Scriptures on Stones* where the poet that he mockingly says-- our scriptures have become stones and we too who do not understand them. So, there is actually no we think our duties over once we have inscribed something on the stones and we think that we are actually reminiscing our scriptures and we are paying our humble prayers.

But then the poet says scriptures have become stones and we too our consciences have also become stones who do not understand them. So, if it is written on them one needs to go beyond and think about, but perhaps not we simply go for a pleasure trip on a pleasure trip derive pleasure come back forget. So, in this collection we find a collection of ten poems comprising Ram, Ravidas, Shabari, Eklavya, Taj Mahal, Gandhi, Meera, Buddha, Kabir and Ganga.

So, you can find all sorts of these representative heroes which history has got included in several books and scriptures, but then it is one way to remember them and to familiarise our new generations with these realities and know them.

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“Rama”

The God-incarnate now decided to
Decamp Sita’s linear figures into
a vertical zone of conscience that
cried hoarse into normativities not
Rama’s own. Morality fixtures are not
Clandestine horse races that one wins or loses
in the notoriety of time.
The socially-cultured fabrics of Rama’s
being made him love
what He should have hated.

15

So, in one poem after another whether it is the delineation of Rama, whether it is the delineation of Ravidas or is it the delineation of Shabari. So, through all these, love is at the centre of it. And when the poet talks about in the famous poem “Rama”, he says- “The God incarnate now decided to/ decamp Sita’s linear figures into/ a vertical zone of conscience that/ cried hoarse into normativities not/ Rama’s own. Morality fixtures are not clandestine horse races that one wins or loses/ in the notoriety of time the socially cultured fabrics of Rama’s/ being made him love/ what he should have hated.”

But then could Ram really because what happened? Sita was always by his side, but could he really protect Sita when Sita was being kidnapped, no.

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Contd...

The exterior Ram had lost
to the interior Ram and the
fabric facade of degenerated
Symbols could not bring Sita
back. ... Sita refused
to get back to where Ram was
for her linear glory was sold
on the pseudo-pyres of sanctity.

16

And then the poet again says- “The exterior Ram had lost/ to the interior Ram and the/ fabric facade of degenerated/ symbols could not bring Sita /back... Sita refused/ to get back to where Ram was/ for her linear glory was sold/ on the pseudo- pyres of sanctity.” So, again the poet puts a question in the mouth of Sita.

(Refer Slide Time: 39:26)

“Ravidas”

Ravidas became a cobbler by
virtue or vice that he
perforated in his yester
years...
Brahmins’ refusal to
dine with Ravidas made
him dine with each one
of them in a distinct game
of seasons where one centre
multiplies into peripheral
zones that acquire a centrality
of their own.

17

And it is a question not only to Rama it is a question to the patriarchal order, my dear friends. Again he takes up another poem entitled “Ravidas” where he talks about Ravidas the famous

saint, you know, who came from a low caste-- leather working caste. But then he had acclaimed a lot of respect even among various religions across religions.

And then the poet says- “Ravidas became a cobbler by/ virtue or vice that he/ perforated in his yester years.../ even Brahmins’ refusal to/ dine with Raidas made/ him dine with each one/ of them in a distinct game/ of seasons where one centre/ multiplies into peripheral/ zones that acquire a centrality /of own.”

The poet here actually says that caste is not that important. It is through your personal endeavours and through your personal penance that you can have a sort of achievement. And you know Ravidas had become famous and many of Ravidas’ lines because Ravidas has got a very revered space even among Sikhs and all. And you can find greater details about Ravidas--a 15th or 16th century Bhakti saint Ravidas was.

And you know Ravidas happened to be the guru of Meera, Meera accepted Ravidas as her own guru.

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Contd...

Meera's
search for guru was a
tale interchanged costumes
in euphorias of soulful
have and sensuous budgetary
of seasons. Broken and
torn, solitary and forlorn,
Meera met destiny in the
breaking of her footwear
which she requested Raidas
to sew and save her from smear.
Raidas saw beyond horizontal binaries
into elemental destiny

swajani 18


“Meera’s /search for guru was a/ tale interchanged costumes/ in euphorias of soulful/ have and sensuous budgetary/ of seasons. Broken and/ torn solitary and forlorn/ Meera met destiny in the/ breaking of her footwear.” Meera actually had her footwear broken and then, “which she requested Raidas/ to sue and save her from a smear/ Raidas saw beyond horizontal binaries/ into elemental destiny.”

(Refer Slide Time: 41:17)




Contd...

Tradition made Raidas
a scriptural saint of
Multi-coloured shoes; he
enjoyed the hue and the
linen that coated our
bodies forever sunken!
Raidas would donate
footwear to brahmins
whose feat had brazen
Bronzes cranking as
if under the floors of
the sea.

.....



.....Religion
is not a system but a living tissue
that we must all encase
and bathe in. Raidas
could not be killed by the dalits
of thought; humiliated though
and vanquished ever, Raidas
made history live forever.

   19




So, it continues you can have a look at it because you know I always believe that at my back I always hear time's winged chariot hurrying near.

(Refer Slide Time: 41:26)

“Shabari”

She was born of
a forest tree and
a flowing river into
the mountains high and
ditches nigh ! The
sagacity of devdar trees
and the crystal transparency
of rivers had made Shabari
an innocent milk-cake
that was never tasted but
by the self-consuming
Fires getting volatile for a
glimpse of Lord Ram.

The grammar of civility
they said she knew not
for her tribal origins
had made her a 'Lucy' of
sort. The monogamic
shudra
entropy was not bizarre
but a sprung cloud of
mortality
that hid the gem
That she was.

   20


Then there is a depiction of Shabari where the poet describes Shabari even she was born of a forest tree and flowing river into the mountains high in ditches nigh. But Shabari actually wanted to offer Rama the plum that was sweet and for that she had to test it maybe it can be considered different, but Rama accepted it.

(Refer Slide Time: 41:52)

Contd...

Shabari became an ugly sculpture for the speedsters of culture who sold God on the markets of London while New York waited in abeyance and abandon... Wordsworthian 'Lucy' junked the senile doors of her crooked fate into Blakean Chimney-Sweeper a child we "gave birth to but only to disown. Shabari was the Composite fruit of society's Collective being who wanted an ushering but was uprooted even before she could bloom.

Shabari was a dalit, a down-caste lady with an inverted uphill; Rama was a Kshatriya god seeking Sita... Shabari became a scripture on the stony walls of her being that divinely moved in a million of years In the agony of love and the berries of tears.
.....
Shabari was a tribal and a shudra too who outsmarted History's piercing shafts changing herself into a galaxy of stardom nest.



21


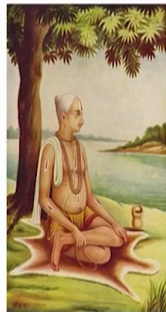
And “Shabari was a Dalit a/ downcast lady with/ an inverted uphill, Rama/ was a Kshatriya God seeking Sita.../ Shabari became a scripture/ on the stony walls of her/ being that divinely moved/ in a million of years/ in the agony of love and/ the berries of tears./ Shabari was a tribal and/ a Shudra too who outsmarted/ History’s piercing shafts/ changing herself into/ a galaxy of stardom nest.”

(Refer Slide Time: 42:22)

Contd...

.....Tulsi's social vision was still a python's month while Shabari's was as endlessly liberating cacophony of tears. Humility has always won over the crow-consciences whosoever they might be.

If Tulsi could sacrifice his all for Rama why could he not abandon the sacred portions of his being to the inbreathings of life where all is Rama whatever you see?



22

It continues my dear friend.

(Refer Slide Time: 42:26)

“Eklavya”

Elkavya sucked tribal
simplicity with a forward glance
upon his native chords of
identity. The loving trees
that grew around and bushes that
encircled his being never
foresook their green
Gardener’s infamy for him
nor prohibit spontaneity to
Be jeopardized into a malignant
pool of water...
The fiery pots of Elkavya’s
pious mortality of being
limpingly went into the sacrilegiously
sacred ashram of gum Drona
begging for tutelage that
could not fructify for history
itself had become a harlot
and a witless dunce hitting
Eklavya with its severe punch...

Submission beyond known
limits of thought and disciple’s
self-loss in Guru made Eklavya
mad in devotion. History again
became a harlot as Drona
begged for Eklavya’s
arrowing thumb.
Submission beyond known
limits of thought and disciple’s
self-loss in Guru made Eklavya
mad in devotion. History again
became a harlot as Drona
begged for Eklavya’s
arrowing thumb.

23


And then he also talks about Eklavya who had not hesitated when Dronacharya wanted some sort of *guru dakshina*. It is actually said that Dronacharya had refused to become Eklavya’s guru and Eklavya returned and made a clay of Dronacharya and worshipped him and he achieved perfection at archery. And then when Dronacharya came to know about it through Arjuna, Dronacharya asked for a *guru dakshina* and what Eklavya did? Eklavya actually cut his thumb and offered it.

So, this is how the poet actually tries to say that it is not the question of caste it is actually a question of reverence, it is actually question of faith. It is question of determination, it is actually a question of how one can win through one’s own determination.

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Contd...

Eklavya offered his blood-ridden thumb in the full devotion of his conscience. Drona didn't Groan in pain as she had none. The protagonist of history became a lizard driven to smokes of time. History rolled back as conscience had died on the snow-mountains that never melted into the soul-fountains.



Drona got the thumb and Eklavya bled in more senses than one.

24

“Drona got/ the thumb and Eklavya bled/ in more senses than one.”

(Refer Slide Time: 43:19)

Contd...

...The difference between Shahjahan's Butchery of mason's hands and Eklavya's cutting of thumb resides only in this that the one ordered butchery while the other begged for it... Eklavya had a mother too and a father but gurus place is a self-sketch unto eternity.

The mother dreamt of Everest glory of arrowed regions for the labours of his son; she shrank in petrified doomsday while the father Became a statue of stone. Eklavya did not know his moorings, became a deaf and dumb who would ever remain a rootless crumb never hoping to get back his thumb.

25

“The difference between Shah Jahan's/ butchery of mason's hands/ and Eklavya's cutting of thumb/ resides only in this/ that the one ordered butchery/ while the other begged for it.../” And the poet actually shows very beautifully at the difference, my dear friend you can have a look at the lines I have already provided? fine.

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In Defence of Poetry

- That poetry can be a source of sensuous enjoyment is a message given by the dilettantes of culture. Poetry has always been penance, suffering, pain that ultimately leads to enlightenment. The words in poetry are not used in ordinary sense of the term: they are earned by the poet, germinated by him in the soil that he is. The poetic land is furrowed by the poet's own labour and sweat, the motivational component not excluded. Regarding the metaphysical elements, I confess, my poetry needs an initiated reader. Indianness is largely our spiritual heritage which I make use of as a dimension of human consciousness. However, the verbal repertoire in which I couch the spiritual experience is a post-modernist medium in which the image and symbols seem to be generating illusions of various kinds: it is ultimately such images that leads to the *tathagata*, which all of us should become. (Rainbow Redemption, 243)

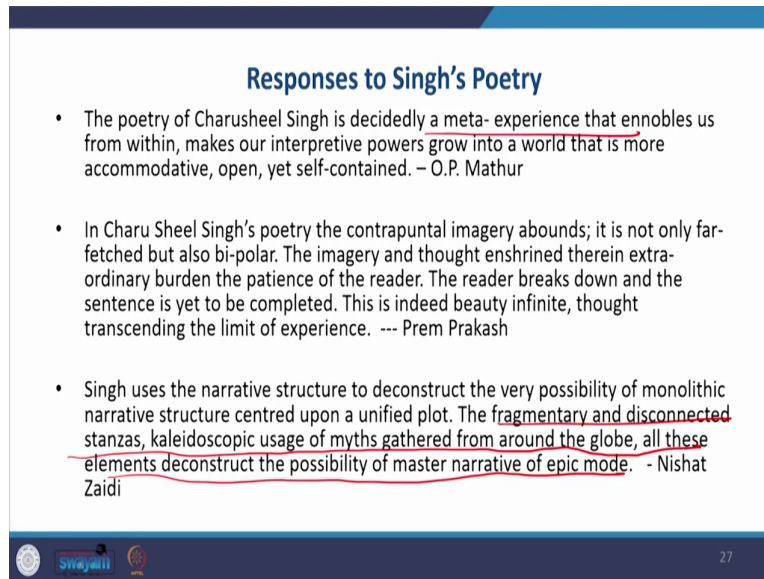
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Now, the question that I once asked because Charu Sheel Charu Sheel's poetry is very pedantic, philosophical and all and when I once in an interview I asked him about poetry what he says is really very awe inspiring. He says that "Poetry can be a source of sensuous enjoyment is a message given by the dilettantes of culture." He does not believe that poetry is a sensuous enjoyment, but he says, "Poetry has always been penance, suffering, pain that ultimately leads to enlightenment. The words and poetry are not used in ordinary sense of the term they are earned by the poet germinated by him in the soil. The poetic land is furrowed by the poet's own labour and sweat the motivational component not excluded. Regarding the metaphysical elements, (as the poet himself says) my poetry needs an initiated reader. Indianness is largely our spiritual heritage which I make use of as a dimension of human consciousness. However, the verbal repertoire in which I couch the spiritual experience is a postmodern medium in which the image and symbol seems to be generating illusions of various kinds. It is ultimately such images that lead to the *tathagata* which all of us should become."

So, we as poetry lovers, poetry readers and poets should be a sort of *tathagata* a sort of *parivrajaka*. We always should be in search of meaning.

And that the words of a poem are not only for sensuous enjoyment, but they are for a sort of enlightenment. Of course, there has been few works on Charu Sheel, but then there have been poets and critics who have of course, appreciated the poetic oeuvre of Charu Sheel.

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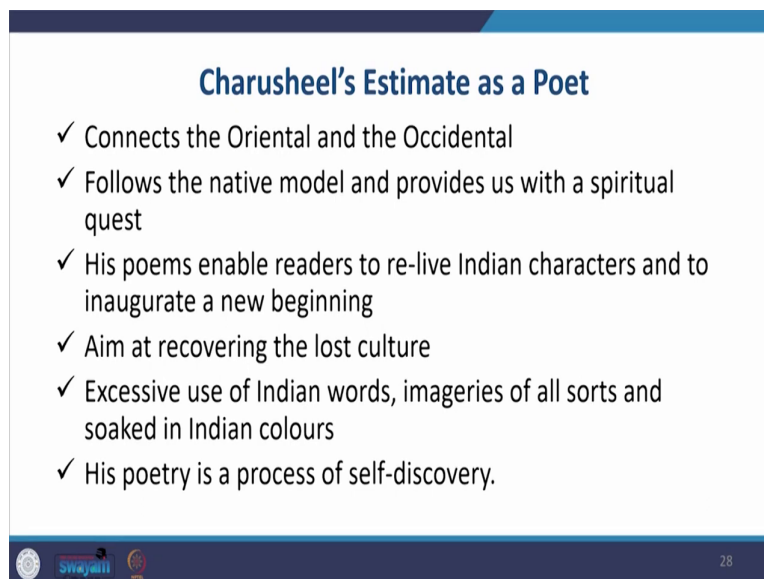
Responses to Singh's Poetry

- The poetry of Charusheel Singh is decidedly a meta- experience that ennobles us from within, makes our interpretive powers grow into a world that is more accommodative, open, yet self-contained. – O.P. Mathur
- In Charu Sheel Singh's poetry the contrapuntal imagery abounds; it is not only far-fetched but also bi-polar. The imagery and thought enshrined therein extraordinary burden the patience of the reader. The reader breaks down and the sentence is yet to be completed. This is indeed beauty infinite, thought transcending the limit of experience. --- Prem Prakash
- Singh uses the narrative structure to deconstruct the very possibility of monolithic narrative structure centred upon a unified plot. The fragmentary and disconnected stanzas, kaleidoscopic usage of myths gathered from around the globe, all these elements deconstruct the possibility of master narrative of epic mode. - Nishat Zaidi

27

And what is of a quite significant to note is what O. P. Mathur says, “ The poetry of Charu Sheel is decidedly a meta- experience”, that is why it is difficult. And then what Nishat Zaidi says is “the fragmentary and disconnected stanzas, kaleidoscopic uses of myths gathered from around the globe-- all these elements deconstruct the possibility of master narrative of epic mode.”

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Charusheel's Estimate as a Poet

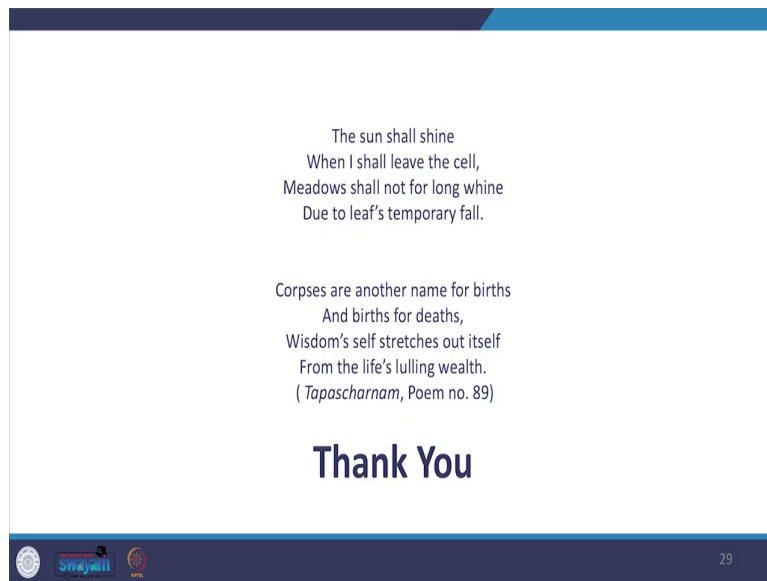
- ✓ Connects the Oriental and the Occidental
- ✓ Follows the native model and provides us with a spiritual quest
- ✓ His poems enable readers to re-live Indian characters and to inaugurate a new beginning
- ✓ Aim at recovering the lost culture
- ✓ Excessive use of Indian words, imageries of all sorts and soaked in Indian colours
- ✓ His poetry is a process of self-discovery.

28

My dear friends, to unravel the beauty of Charusheel as a poet requires too much of time, but then we are sorry because we have a limitation of time. So, we can make a sort of estimate

about the poet. Charusheel as a poet connects the oriental and the occidental. He follows the native model and provides us with a spiritual quest, his poems enable readers to relive Indian characters and to inaugurate a new beginning. His poetry is a process of self discovery and I hope that the coming generation of poetry lovers will find a lot of thought in the world of a Charusheel's a poetry.

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And let me end here with some of the lines once again from *Tapascharnam* where the poet says, “The sun shall shine/ when I shall leave the cell/ Meadows shall not for long whine/ due to leaf's temporary fall.” Because life is to come and to go. “Corpses are another name for births/ and births for deaths”. Life and Death are continuities. “Wisdom's self stretches out itself/ from the life's lulling wealth.”

My dear friends, with with this optimistic note we have to wind up this talk. But I do hope that the posterity will remember Charu Sheel as a poet who always decided and understood that life is a journey and a good poet has an aim not only to entertain, but to educate, but to enlighten. With these words I end this lecture.

Thank you very much, I wish you all a very good day.