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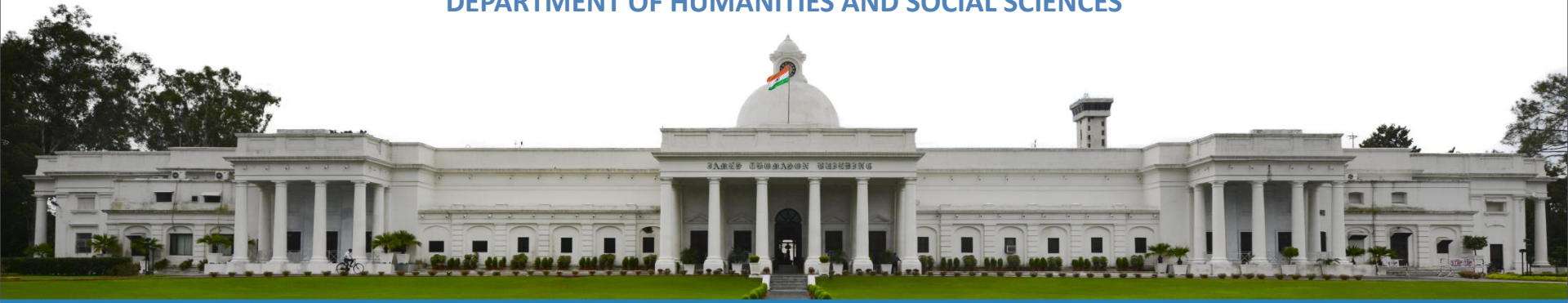
NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

Indian Poetry in English

Lecture 29: Charu Sheel Singh

BINOD MISHRA

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Socio-Political Conditions

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

Introduction

- Born in1955, 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, Budhha, Swami Vivekanada 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’.



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

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)



Tapascharnam

- 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

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.

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?

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)

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)

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)

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

Arjunas 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.

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



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)

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.

Love poems

“Savitri”

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)

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)

He had murder’d
Millions of Mumtaj’s that
Could have grown into trillions
Of Tajs! 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)

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)

“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.

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.

“Ravidas”

Ravidas became a cobbler by virtue or vice that he perforated in his yester years…
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 their own.

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

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 crankling 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.

“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.

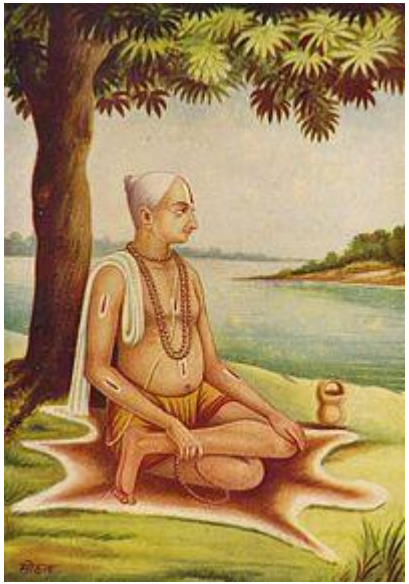
Contd…

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.

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?

“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 infancy 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.
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Contd…

Eklavya offered his
blood-ridden thumb in
the full devotion of his
conscience. Drona didn't
Groan in pain a 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.

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.

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)

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 extra-ordinary 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

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.

The sun shall shine
When I shall leave the cell,
Meadows shall not for long whine
Due to leaf's temporary fall.

Corpses are another name for births
And births for deaths,
Wisdom's self stretches out itself
From the life's lulling wealth.
(*Tapascharnam*, Poem no. 89)

Thank You

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