SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.688| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 6 | June 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

THE MANDALA OF MIND AND METAPHOR: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF CHARU SHEEL SINGH'S POETIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL VISION

N R Gopal
Professor, Dept. of English, CUHP, Dharamshala

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra22238
DOI No: 10.36713/epra22238

ABSTRACT

This paper gives an integrative overview of the literary, critical, and philosophical contributions of an influential voice in Indian English literature, Charu Sheel Singh. Singh's work spans multiple disciplines—poetry, literary criticism, comparative aesthetics, and Indian philosophy—each reflecting a unified vision grounded in Indian metaphysical traditions and in dialogue with global theory. Singh's oeuvre, anchored in his magnum opus Kashi: A Mandala Poem, plumbs the depths of sacred geography, mythic memory, consciousness, language, and being. It explores the kinds of spaces—inner, outer, and sacred—that human beings inhabit. The kinds that poets and workers of the Word can help to rethink, reconfigure, recover, and reclaim, if need be. In short, this paper offers an overview of Prof. Singh's intellectual and poetic output and what can be said to be a mandalic model of thought where different kinds of knowledge radiate from a shared, or if you prefer, a held ontological center.

KEYWORDS: *Charu Sheel Singh, Indian English poetry, literary theory, sacred geography, comparative aesthetics, Kashmir Shaivism, rasa, dhvani, mandala, consciousness, Indian Knowledge Systems.*

INTRODUCTION

Charu Sheel Singh (1955–2021) holds a one-of-a-kind position in the literary and intellectual history of Indian English. He was a poet, a theorist, a literary critic, and a philosopher. He was all these things, but their boundaries do not quite fit Singh's work. He writes across and between them. He is not easy to classify because, just as he does, with such elegance and grace, in his poems and his poetics, he enfolds Indian spiritual traditions—Kashmir Shaivism, Vedanta, and Tantra, those three great rivers of the Indian metaphysical imagination—with Western modernist and postmodernist sensibilities.

In contrast to dominant trends in Indian English literature—either rooted in social realism or the identities of a diaspora—Singh turned to divinity, ontology, and consciousness as the core reflective categories of his literary snapshots. His theoretical orientation swam against the current of the established critical models that have emerged from Eurocentric waters. At the same time, he did not row back to a reactionary, traditionally anchored approach. Instead, Singh explored the dialogic and spiritual potential of literary practices composed in the Indic tradition and responsive to philosophical goings-on in the East and the West:

> *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. (Mishra)*

Poet of Sacred Geography: *Kashi: A Mandala Poem*

The long poem *Kashi: A Mandala Poem* (2007) is the work for which Singh is preeminently known. It not only reinterprets the physical or cultural notion of the city of Varanasi but also establishes the city as the symbolic and metaphysical center of the universe. The poem is built as a kind of sacred diagram, Indic in nature, used for meditative or spiritual transformation. It consists of a series of poetic invocations that move from the very farthest reaches of the paltry layer of human existence that is the profane to the innermost, purified center of sacred consciousness that is so close to the Divine as to be an instant, unfathomable dimension. Singh's poetic project stands out due to its unique blend of narrative mythology, philosophical introspection, and modernist technique. Kashi is not simply captured in words; it is performed on the page. The poem draws deeply from the *tirtha* (pilgrimage) traditions of Hindu India, even as it hews closely to postmodern poetic forms, intertextuality, and fragmentation. Singh writes of the city, sculpted by Shiva's breath, where time is not linear but folds upon itself, and each ghat might as well be a threshold—both echoing memory and the possibility of transcendence.

SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.688| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 6 | June 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

The figures from Indian tradition—Shiva, Ganga—are part of the poem. It makes references to Western thinkers like Eliot, Joyce, Blake, and Derrida. Yet it never becomes a pastiche. The use of language is incantatory and meditative, even echoing mantric traditions. In that way, poetry becomes a ritual act; a textual yajna, even. The personal, the cosmic, and the poetic orders are somehow aligned. The poet emerges as both seer and pilgrim. It is mentioned regarding the poem:

> There are many scriptural descriptions related to the genesis of the worship of Shiva in Kashi, and also about creation of Kashi. Poet Charu Sheel Singh records in his poem Kashi as spiritual and cultural centre and also as the 'city of death'. The rare combination of mystical, mythical, historical, and philosophical imagination of Prof. Singh creates a Kashi which is not entirely new, but the way he has approached Kashi with the concept of 'Mandala' is unique, and it remains not a place, but a phenomenon. (Singh et al).

Critic of Indian Literary Modernity

Prof. Singh consistently highlighted in his critical writings the absolute necessity for Indian English literature to establish an independent aesthetic rooted in its own knowledge systems. He asked the kind of unblinking questions that needed to be asked about the unreflective takeover of Western forms and standards, and he pointed toward South Asia's venerable literary traditions as treasure houses not only of aesthetic principles but also of civilizational visions of knowledge.

Prof. Singh assessed the writings of modern Indian English writers not just on form or theme, but ontologically. He valued all their formal innovations; still, he believed Indian English poetry might realize its true potential as something metaphysical (as opposed to merely social or psychological) before too long. He was highly condemnatory of what he referred to as "anthropological poetics"—a brand of writing that aimed merely to mirror cultural identity or eccentric dissimilarity, and not to grapple with any sort of profound truth. Singh's primary contention was that this kind of writing shunned earnest investigation into universal verities—like metaphysics, ontology, or spiritual wisdom—that he held should be at the very heart of literature:

> A poet, critic, thinker, and Yogi combined in one, Charu Sheel, with an aim to awaken the coming generation of its ancient past, scripted many poetry collections soaked in the Indian narrative tradition. (Verma and Mishra 89)

Criticism for Singh encompassed more than simply making evaluative judgments. He saw the critic as a mediator who must navigate traditions both ancestral and current, activating memories of the past alongside cultural insight in the work of judging a text's worth. In this role, Singh did more than simply criticize; he contributed to a growing postcolonial discourse advocating for epistemic sovereignty, the act of asserting that not just frameworks made in the West but also those made in India are relevant in the work of knowledge production.

Theorist of Transcultural Aesthetics

Among Singh's most original contributions is his role as a theorist of comparative poetics and transcultural aesthetics. His book *Literary Theory: Possibilities and Limits*(1991*)* challenges the dominance of Western critical theories while avoiding the pitfall of chauvinistic traditionalism. Instead, he offers a deeply philosophical, dialogic model where Indian and Western ideas can be brought into creative tension:

> Transcultural Aesthetics, in its academic rigor, is a critical and interdisciplinary field that interrogates the construction, negotiation, and contestation of aesthetic values across diverse cultural contexts, aiming to decolonize aesthetic theory and promote more inclusive and equitable understandings of beauty and artistic expression. (Sustainability Directory)

Singh puts Indian aesthetic categories such as *rasa, dhvani, aucitya*, and *ananda* into dialogue with Western concepts like mimesis, différance, and the author's death. He draws analogies between Bhartrihari's theory of *sphota* and Derrida's notion of différance, between Abhinavagupta's *rasa-anubhava* and Lacan's split subject, between the Tantric unity of Shiva-Shakti and Hegel's dialectics. When the poet proclaims "Kashi," it isn't only a matter of naming a geographical place; it is also the evocation of a city's divine presence, a centuries-long accumulation of ritual memory, and a profound metaphysical resonance. This layered meaning encapsulates *sphoṭa*. It is not deferral. But he does not do mere comparing—he seeks to synthesize. Singh sees literary theory not as a dry academic exercise but as a sadhana, a path toward consciousness. He critiques structuralism for its rigidity, postmodernism for its nihilism, and ideological criticism for its reductionism. What he suggests is a sacred hermeneutics in which the critic reads the text not as a riddle to be figured out but as a revelation to be lived. Literature, then, is not representation; it is participation—an act of becoming.

Philosopher of Consciousness and Language

Singh's thought is sustained by an inquiry into consciousness and language, two of the most profound categories in Indian and Western thought. He returns with fervor to the Vedic and Tantric idea that the universe is *Sabda-Brahman*—a cosmos woven from sound and vibration. For Singh, language is not a tool but a field of energy, and poetry is its most condensed, luminous form. Based

SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.688| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 6 | June 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

on Bhartrihari, Singh perceives each word (*śabda)* as a moment of revelation (*sphota*), wherein meaning explodes not from syntax but from silence. He compares this with Derrida's différance and acknowledges its cleverness in pointing out the instability of meaning. However, he moves beyond it toward the spiritual realization that meaning is not deferred forever; it is present in the very act of poetic consciousness. Singh shares Abhinavagupta's perspective that aesthetic experience (*rasa)* is the medium through which we transcend individuality (ego) and know ourselves as the non-dual Self. This perspective emphasizes directly apprehending the content of experience vis-à-vis the ego's attempt to know something indirectly by inferring its properties (*anubhava* vs. *pratyakṣa*). "According to the dhvani/rasa school of poetics, which has dominated Sanskrit criticism since the ninth century A.D., the soul of poetry is *rasa,* a sentiment or the essence of an emotion, and this is communicated through *dhvani*, suggestion or nuance" (Rustomji 75). This incidentally makes Singh not only a theorist of poetics but also a philosopher (of being) in the context of the South Asian literary tradition, both because he emphasizes directly knowing and because he articulates a South Asian poetic worldview.

Towards a Unified Vision of Knowledge

Integrated vision: Singh's greatest legacy is his vision of a kind of "mandala model of literary consciousness." Just as a mandala organizes spiritual space into concentric patterns radiating from a center, Singh's work radiates from a metaphysical core. Poetry, philosophy, and theory are not separate disciplines in his world but interdependent modes of awakening. Be it writing about Kashi, interpreting a Sanskrit *shloka*, or engaging with Heidegger and Lacan, Singh's inquiry remains centered on the ontological question: What does it mean to be? His work resists the fragmentation that all too often is the hallmark of modern academia. For Singh, intellectual life is not about relentless compartmentalization but about coherence, not about narrowing one's focus to a single specialty but about building one's research base so that it resembles a large manifold—like a good synoptic scale weather map, rather than a collection of loose, nonfunctional pieces. In this respect, Singh anticipates current attempts to construct integrative knowledge systems, be they in the Indian Knowledge Systems framework or in contemporary cross-cultural philosophy. He offers a bridge between textual scholarship and the contemplative traditions of India, between the analytic rigor of modern philosophy and the poetic intuition more often found in religions and the arts. He represents a mode of Indian intellectualism that is both ancient and immediately relevant to our contemporary world.

CONCLUSION: LEGACY AND RELEVANCE TODAY

Prof. Charu Sheel Singh has significantly contributed as a poet, critic, and philosopher. He has created a body of work that is at once unusual and somewhat unified. He has entered the Western intellectual dialogue with persuasive authority. He has not rejected Indian poetics but has instead embraced and reanimated it, making it once again a vital philosophy and one of great relevance. He revitalized Indian poetics not out of nostalgia but as a vibrant philosophy. He did not practice criticism as judgment but as a form of yoga. He composed poetry not for the sake of expression but to call forth the divine. We live in a moment when discourse has become so fractured that it is hard to see how the parts might add up. Singh's mandalic vision reminds us that possibility still exists—that the parts can sum to a whole. Literary practice can be as spiritually edifying (or as spiritually mundane, depending on your taste) as any form of direct spiritual practice. Singh writes with the kind of wholeness that is the hallmark of spiritual practice. That is the real shortcut to decolonization: learning to see the world whole in an age of fragmented sight. Thus, Singh's legacy lies in not choosing between tradition and modernity, the East and the West, the sacred and the literary. He instead wove them together; he wrote, thought, and lived within a luminous mind and metaphor mandala.

WORKS – CITED

1. *Mishra, Indrajeet. Aesthetics of Sublime and the Poetry of Charu Sheel Singh. https://glocalcolloquies.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/09.-Dr-Indrajeet-Mishra-101.pdf*
2. *Singh, Mahima, et al. "Exploration of Kashi in Charu Sheel Singh's 'Kashi: A Mandala Poem.'" International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences, vol. 10, no. 2, Jan. 2025, pp. 109–12. https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.102.19.*
3. *Rustomji, Roshni. "'RASA' AND 'DHVANI' IN INDIAN AND WESTERN POETICS AND POETRY." Journal of South Asian Literature, vol. 16, no. 1, 1981, pp. 75–91. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40873623.*
4. *Sustainability Directory. "Transcultural Aesthetics → Term." Lifestyle → Sustainability Directory, 3 Mar. 2025, https://lifestyle.sustainability-directory.com/term/transcultural-aesthetics/*
5. *Verma, Meenakshi, and Binod Mishra. "Revisiting Indian Scriptures: A Study of Charu Sheel Singh's Scripture on Stone." Critique, vol. 17, Taylor & Francis, Jan. 2021, pp. 88–97, www.researchgate.net/publication/353826531_Revisiting_Indian_Scriptures_A_Study_of_Charu_Sheel_Singh%27s_Scripture_on_Stone.*