



# Exploration of Kashi in Charu Sheel Singh's "Kashi: A Mandala Poem"

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**Abstract**— Kashi is known as ancient living city of the world and famous as abode of Lord Shiva. Rishi Maharshi of all sects and religion do Yog and sadhana here since beginning weather Sage Agastya in Satyug or Vyas in Dwapar. 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 rather a phenomenon. The characters, legends, Vedic or Puranic stories related to Kashi are part of his consciousness that he melts into figuration. In the beginning of the poem, he has acknowledged his indebtedness for the materials he has drawn from various sources but especially he has mentioned Puranas. Poet Charu Sheel Singh is widely reviewed in the English-speaking world. Prof. P. S. Shastri in a personal letter to poet said that C. S Singh has shown the whole Romantic Scholarship a new pathway to explore.



**Keywords**— Visheshwer, Kashi as spiritual centre, Rituals and Culture of Kashi, Mandala and Mahasamshan.

Charu Sheel Singh's poetic imagination depicts Kashi in his poem as the body of Shiva and the whole Kashi area is measured with Shiva lingas in the form of circle keeping Visheshwer in the Centre. Poet opines that in Satyug Kashi existed on the trident of Shiva while in succeeding ages it becomes a chariot, cakra and conch shell. He writes:

The Conch-shell perambulation  
gyrated into a nocturnal dance  
emanating Kashi from the  
sea-bed silences that  
hid- within Shiva's cosmic

graveyard of meaning. (1)

For him Kashi is not merely name of temporal place. It is the script of trans-temporality however, it has its birth from eternity, "Kashi is the endless Pranava/whose folktale stories never/begin or end."

Time's

adverbial fire could neither  
inflame nor deflame the eternity  
which marked its repertoires into  
an unknown girl called Parvati (14)

Poet writes about Ganga's presence in Kashi- created a history. He describes it as "subaltern flow" (1) and Shiva

made a memory forever by shrinking Ganga in his Jata. For the poet exploration of Kashi is not only knowledge about folk, rituals etc. rather "Kashi is the biography of a nation that autographs memory on the folio pages of cremation."

Poet describes eternity of Panchganga Ghat of Varanasi which is considered as the confluence of five rivers Saraswati, Yamuna, Mandakini, Kirana and Ganga out of which only Ganga is visible and rest are ethereal manifestation. He says the moment textual inscription of Ganga took place on the earth it remains not only salvational text rather its linearity is broken into "Sister devices of salvation that Saraswati, Mandakini, Varuna and Assi" (Singh,5) which ultimately results into the "bindu sea-shores of Eternity" (Singh,5)

Shiva generated concept of time in the form of Kashi. He is a great creative force who imagined the world with Parvati who is no other self but female incarnation of Shiva. Parvati is the creative power with whom Shiva brings the whole world in existence. Time generates various mortal bodies. Beginning of time is the declaration of death for all the forms of life. In the entire poem poet has time and again mentioned the concept of time i.e not derivative of various myths which he has gone through. In western philosophical tradition Immanuel Kant is well known for his presumption of the category of time. He separated categories of time and space. He said time existed before anything else in the universe. For Kant time is the category in which events and things are born; time was not born at any given time. This poem brings forth a time when "Time waited to be/ born in tonal bodies that became/planetary music of spheres (Singh, 12). Poet himself makes it clear that Kant is inadequate. He writes,

Kant and Kashmir are rotundities

of thought that rise and fall,

freeze and frost. Kashi is a thoughtless

eternity where terrestrial heights

and brutish sea-deep equivocally

meet and evaporate. (Singh. 45)

The current of time i.e unstoppable past-present-future is folded into something else. It gets a definite shape available in space through some strange transformation it becomes space.

The tiny digital delights' gross

expulsion from the cosmic body made

God inseminate the egg of Kashi in the

cobweb cracks of sizzling imagination (Singh 7)

Poet declares inadequacy of language and the limitations of literature loudly, "Kashi is the bindu a cosmic/nursery

of silken ideas that delimit/our circling capacities into ecstatic damnations (91-92).

Shiva who is the bindu (centre) of Mandala is the beginning of manifold creation. The bodily fragments of Shiva are gathered Himalayan heights. Poet with his imagination expresses beautifully relationship of Shiva and Ganga into lineaments of figuration. Making use of poetic license instead of direct references from *Puranas* he creates allusion. He writes magnetic power of earth bore Ganga on the multiple folds of its silences. In her book Diana L Eck "Banaras: City of Light" she equates geography of Benaras with mandala. She explicates that "Hindus say of Banaras that it stands at the centre of the earth as the place of creation and gathers together the whole of the sacred universe in a single symbolic circle, a mandala. Yet it is not an earthly city. Kashi is said to sit above the earth as a "crossing place" (tirtha) between this world and the "far shore" of the transcendent Brahman."

(6) Prof. Rana P. B Singh in his paper "Kashi and Shiva: Interrelatedness and Making of Cosmos" has also explicated Shiva lingas as mandala which are self-born or installed by sages, planets or Gods. In his study decoding of numerical and structure of Lingas lead to understand that the city is itself symbol of total knowledge. He writes, "The frame of the cosmic reality, according to ancient Hindu thought, consists of the three fundamental states called evolution (shrishti), existence (stithi), and involution (samhara) that act in an infinite cyclic process. Each one of these phases is controlled by a god, named Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Shiva (the one who completes the cosmic cycle and re-start it); these three gods form a kind of Trinity (trimurti). Shiva, being the last to complete the cycle from which a new cycle starts, is known as Mahadeva, the Supreme Divinity" (1)

Poet perceives Kashi as cosmic happening. It has its interrelatedness with cosmos. The seed of all the lives are nurtured into ovaries of "Mandala". Poet writes that Kashi i.e the abode of Lord Shiva, holding a distinct energy it transforms all darks into lights. Kashi described by poet as Mahashamsan, an eternal place, where divine power keeps into life and death.

The cockroaches' beams of

Satanic dark flew into the bunch

of marigold flowers where

thousand petal set the mandala

into motion. (7)

Death and the rasa generally associated with it (vibhatsa) in the city the known as great cremation ground- the Mahashamsan. Poet writes about the tradition and his allusions go beyond the words:

Silence's vulture overtures

Dovetailed binaries into

archetypal essence that

structure and de-structure nothingness (Singh, 4)

Meru Mountain in Indian system is considered as the centre or axis of the giant earth and universe. Kashi Khanda also reveals confrontation of Vindhya mountain with Meru Mountain which is considered as the centre of universe. It has a huge structure, at the top Devas reside. Some of the Puranic descriptions reveal that Ganga falls down heaven or from the head of Shiva and it comes down from Himalaya. Poet writes:

Meru was the primal seed of  
temporal creation etching its passages from  
a certain beyond that endless; it  
blasted the sun from within the  
folio of its destiny's manifold (9)

Poet presents Kashi itself in the form of Shiva Linga and its genealogy cannot be traced the way one cannot decide Sun arrival on the earth. All existences on the earth mountain, sun, moon everything is manifestation of the different form of Shiva. Meru mountain is in the naval of earth. East, West, North and South are settled as spatial brides and Meru Mountain is like centre (bindu) of Mandala. The echo of Meru goes high in the sky and sink below to earth. It is a divine existence on the earth.

In Kashi Shiva Lings are multiplied into ethereal, subliminal, terrestrial and transcendental which enables poet to delve deep in infinite imagination. *Skand Puran*, *Agani Puran*, *Matsya Puran* have already mentioned about self-born lings and installed Shiva lings by the sages. Gauri, Nandi, Parvati all are female incarnation of Lord Shiva. Poet writes that poetry is the divine happening and transcendental poetry is a bliss. It is a medium to search self. Wordsworth's discovery of nature and peasant world bear the immanental burden. Oneness of all is the key Vedantic notion.

Poet writes that folk culture has its birth from Shiva. Seasons, village, crops, God. Low to high all are born out of him. Kashi is delineated by the poet as the hub of sacrifice and in the hymns of Vedas and Puranas it is described as a place where Shiva resides and it can be obtained by the ritualistic practices.

Kashi was a hyperbole in  
Vedic folk-lore mediating millenniums  
By the tiny rituals of the  
Sea-shore (12).

Poet highlights seed of eternity in Vedic consciousness and says that logocentrism of Vedas has eternal marble images. Poet says typical features of Kashi are designed on the cosmic desire. When Shiva generated concept of time, he felt the need of Parvati who is no other being but female self of Shiva. The nuptial knot of Shiva and Parvati in Kashi is the source of all the forms of creation and life on earth.

In Kashi Bindu Madhav Temple is known as one of the ways of getting salvation. Lord Vishnu who gave Kashi to Shiva is again should Shiva with Vishnu. Kashi is free from the chain of birth and death. It is free from temporal discoveries of only combines different colour of time. Linga Purana is one of the 18 Maha Puranas which has two parts Poorva Bhaag and Uttar Bhaag. Chapter 92 of Uttar Bhaag slok no 42 & 104-107 describes that Lord Shiva himself states to Goddess Parvati that he will never leave Kashi therefore it is *Avi mukta Kshetra* and those who will die in Kashi will be free from the bondage of life and death. Further, the place is known as *moksha dham* according to Kashi Khandokat, "काश्यां मरणां मुक्तिः". The city vibrates with spiritual energy and it has power to make human beings free permanently from material facade. Freedom comes when the cycle of birth and death is not functional and it is as per our scriptures possible not only by dying in Kashi but by the cremation of the dead body on the bank of river Ganga or by pouring down ashes of the cremated body in the pious river. It is believed that Kashi is (*teen lokon se pyari*) more radiant than the wonder of the three worlds. As Lord Shiva has said, "बिना मम प्रसादम् वै, कः काशीं प्रति-पद्यते". The one who resides here it is the wish of Lord Shiva. The way Shakespeare gives a universal and general idea about Almighty in the play Hamlet that even, "there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow"(212) similarly scriptures emphasize particularly about Kashi that even the grain of sand moves here with the wish of Lord Shiva.

Kashi is not the name of the place it is the cosmic seed of all creation which indicates direct relation of Kashi with cosmos. The entire scriptural text generates the body of Shiva as Kashi and the whole Kashi area is measured with Shiva lingas in the form of circle keeping Visheshwar in the centre. In satyug Kashi existed on the trident of Shiva while in succeeding ages it became a chariot, *cakra* and a conch shell. Parvati has also played significant role in the creation of Kashi. Poet describes Kashi in the form of Sri Cakra, i.e the body of goddess which inhabits Shiva within. Therefore, Kashi is a mandala which becomes the body of Goddess. Shiva generated concept of time in the form of Kashi a place he felt the need of Goddess who is not the other one but Shiva's female incarnation- the creative power with whom Shiva brings the whole world

in existence. Kashi as Mandala has four points from where the entry is granted into holy zone, thus kashi incorporates the whole cosmos to understand that one should read entire *Kashi Khanda*, *Linga Puran* and *Agani Purana* which tell us about existence of 3300 Lingas, 64 Yogini 56 Vinayaka with the significance of 7 circles of Dhundhi Vinayaka. Lord Shiva is himself as Linga in the centre of manadala i.e Kashi known as vishweshwara. Further the linga has two intersecting triangles which denotes merger of Shiva and Shakti which is symbol of creation and source of all creation within creation. What we understand as combination of Prakriti and Purush in Sankhya Darshna.

Kashi Vishwanath represents confluence of religious devotion and spirituality. The living traditions of Kashi Vishwanath is "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niramayah"—may all beings be happy, may all be free from disease. These ancient *Vedic* principles echo in the rituals of Kashi Vishwanath, where well-being is intertwined with cultural practices. The cultural importance of Kashi Vishwanath lies not only in its sacred city but also in its role as a living repository of India's cultural and religious heritage. The intricate rituals, festivals and folk practices keep alive the age-old tradition of the place and carry forward its distinctive energy. "Vividh Dharm Gyan Bina, Sahaj Nahin Sahyog Jina."—Living harmoniously without understanding the diverse facets of religion is challenging. Kashi Vishwanath epitomizes this truth, where diverse cultural expressions seamlessly coexist.

Kashi is the sacred abode of Lord Shiva, pulsates with spiritual energy. As the holiest of the twelve Jyotirlingas, it holds a unique place in Hindu mythology and pilgrimage. Here, every ritual is not just a cultural practice but a profound communion with the divine. Indian culture has a deep relationship with river and the significance of Ganga with Lord Shiva is recorded in "Kashi Khanda", "The Ganga, Shiva and Kashi: where this trinity is watchful, no wonder here is found the grace that leads onto perfect bliss or salvation". Kashi Vishwanath is the religious, spiritual and cultural centre.

### CONCLUSION

Kashi is Mahasamshan all of us are tied in manifold bhuvans of our own body and we forget that we are living crematorium made up of dust. The consciousness of death in life is the beginning of new circle within. The moment Kabir Das ji writes "Gagan Mandal mein sej piya ki" It exists for those who could perceive trans-temporal mandala. Kashi and Shiva teach life in death and death in life both. Death is the way to achieve Almighty. All of us are holding concentricity. The ultimate source of all life is the "Aum" which is spread into multiple centres. God has

endowed each object with a kind of energy i.e low or high. The kind of perception we human beings hold low or high accordingly our vision take place. The way to love is through Veebhatsa (the most horrible) atelic freedom belongs to God. Man's appropriation of this atelicity creates the worst kinds of low mimetic visions that demandalise- the whole existence. Death and birth are an ongoing process. Kashi is a place, a temporary stay where what we assimilate inside, we exhale outside. The ultimate realisation is the nothingness of being where the question of space and time is annulled, where the bindu (centre) of mandala transgresses thought words, language and visual imagination. Poet opines that Kashi is not the name of place it is a phenomenon. The place which holds the seed of divinity probably its origin cannot be defined exactly. Despite all researches and knowledge available, spirituality cannot be decoded exactly, it is a journey of one's own. Kashi is a text of trans-temporality and such scripts do not have beginning and ending what is stated in the *Bhagavadgita*.

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