
The Philosophical, Poetic and Transcendental Puran Singh

Sushminderjeet kaur

Associate Professor, Department of English, G.G.N Khalsa College, Civil Lines, Ludhiana (PB), India.

Abstracting life's vital suggestions, and isolating them apart from life, and constructing out of mere philosophical principles so made, the theories of life and death, and then to think that we will be able to generate life-sparks out of such dead heaps of cerebral products, is human vanity and self-deception, which the Guru dismisses as puerile fatuity. It is life which gives subtle suggestions for the working out of a hundred philosophies and we ought to be concerned how to generate and advance the purposes of life and not keep hugging for centuries mere concepts and pet theories.

Spirit of the Sikh

Although every writer writes within the parameters of his own culture yet a literary work is understood in terms of certain traditions and conventions related to his time. The relationship between philosophy and religion is very intimate. Philosophy tries to gain a unified and complete understanding of the world and religion attempts a perfect unify. Philosophy tries to get some unifying conception of the world which shall enable us to grasp its meaning in our thought, so does religion as it also attempts nothing less than the securing of an actual unity or harmony between the individual and the world. In religion, there is an attempt to adjust ourselves to the world around. Religion is concerned both with the knowledge of Supreme. Being and with man's efforts to realize Him. Philosophy widens our knowledge. Religion exhorts us to emulate it. Thus both are complementary to each other. Their aim is to make this world beautiful and worth living. They try to understand the roots of humanity. Philosophy is forever searching, inquiring and questioning. If we define religion as the cultivation of the spiritual values which are ever-present, but sometimes dormant, in the human soul, it is philosophy's concern to analyze those values, determining their source and their objective equivalents.

The system of philosophy, the main concern of which is Soul and God, originated in India, and is probably more than two thousand years old. The etymological meaning of the word philosophy is 'love of learning'. It signifies a natural and a necessary urge in human beings to know themselves and the world in which they live and move and have their being.' It is impossible for man to live without a philosophy.

The Indian Philosophy has its roots in the Vedic period. Indian Philosophy distinctly exhibits a spiritual bent. The essence of religion is not dogmatic in India. Here religion develops as philosophy progressively scales higher planes.

Western Philosophy has remained more or less true to the etymological meaning of philosophy, in being essentially an intellectual quest for Truth. Indian Philosophy, has been, however, intensely spiritual and has always emphasized the need of practical realization of truth.

The Indian philosophy uniquely describes four pillars (purusharthas) of life: the four basic ends (Purusharthas) of human life, as recognized by the Indian tradition, are Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.

Whether religion leads to Philosophy or Philosophy to religion, in India the two are inseparable. While in other countries the few who had most deeply pondered on their religion and most fully entered into the spirit of its founder, were liable to be called heretics by the ignorant. Many were actually punished for the good work they had done in purifying religion from that crust of superstition that will always gather around it. In India the few were honoured and revered even by those who could not yet follow them into the purer atmosphere of free and unfettered thought. Nor was there in India any necessity for honest thinkers to screen their doctrines.

We find a number of ideas in nearly all systems of Indian Philosophy which all philosophers seem to take simply, for granted. The best known of these ideas is that which is known under the name of Metempsychosis. This is a Greek word, like Metempsychosis. It corresponds in meaning to the Sanskrit Samsara, and is rendered in German by Seelenwanderung. To an Indian the idea that the souls of men migrated after death into new bodies of living beings, of animals, even of plants, is so self-evident that it was hardly ever-questioned. We never meet with any attempt at proving or disproving it among the prominent writers of ancient or modern times.

All these ideas exist not only in Indian Philosophy of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, they are in every system of Spiritual Enlightenment. Spiritual Enlightenment denotes Transcendentalism. Transcendentalism is a universal concept where in man conceives himself as a part of and as one with the Great Universe. It obliterates all distances of time and space and takes in its embrace centuries and continents.

Transcendentalism is a complex term, as this word has been used in many different contexts and applied in all sorts of ways from very general to very strict. Transcendentalism is a much misunderstood term. It is not connected with any form of meditation. Simply defined, it is a form of idealism. Among other things, it is a belief that the world and everything in it has a spiritual basis and that God speaks directly to human beings through intuition as well as through nature. The beliefs of Transcendentalism were idealistic, mystical, eclectic and individualistic and influenced the ideas of Plato, Plotinus, as well as the teachings of Confucius, the *Sufis* and the writers of the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagwad Gita*, and our Sikh *Gurus*.

Man may fulfill his divine potentialities through rapt mystical states into which the divine is infused into the human, or through coming in contact with the truth, beauty and goodness embodied in nature and originating in the over-soul. Thus occurs the correspondence between the tangible world and the human mind and the identity of moral and physical laws through the belief in the divine authority of the soul's intuitions and impulses. Based on the identification of the individual Soul with God, there developed the doctrine of self-reliance and individualism, the disregard of external authority, tradition and logical demonstration and the absolute optimism of the movement.

The transcendentalists' concept of a spiritual, inner body within the physical body of a man has been termed the conscience, the Inner Light. Transcendentalism maintains that man has ideas that come not through the five senses, or the powers of reasoning, but are either the result of direct revelation from God, his immediate inspiration, or his immanent presence in the spiritual world and it asserts

that man has something besides the body of flesh, a spiritual body, with a sense to perceive what is true and right and beautiful, and a natural love for these, as the body for its food.

Though transcendentalism is a philosophical and literary movement, flourished in New England as a reaction against 18th century rationalism, yet examples of the spirit of transcendentalism can be seen continuing into the 20th century. Walt Whitman claimed that transcendentalism led him in the writing of *Leaves of Grass*. Emily Dickinson could have said the same about her poetry. Nathaniel Hawthorne was profoundly affected by it.

The endeavor of the human mind to grasp the Ultimate and to enjoy the blessed state, can be called a state of mysticism, or the blessedness of actual communion with the Highest is mysticism. Mysticism is the experience of achieving direct apprehension of a Unity, a Oneness, or a One that is without internal multiplicity. Mysticism is the pursuit of communion with, identity with, or conscious awareness of an Ultimate Reality, divinity, spiritual truth, or God through direct experience, intuition, instinct or insight. Mysticism usually centres on practices intended to nurture these experiences. In the contemporary usage mysticism has become an umbrella term conflated with spirituality and esotericism. Mysticism can be distinguished from ordinary religious belief by its emphasis on the direct, personal experience of unique states of consciousness, particularly those of a transcendently blissful character.

Though mystics may vary in their modes of apprehending Reality, and correspondingly in the images they use to signify the goals they pursue, all of them essentially go through an experience which is of a psychological and spiritual character. The symbols and images that we come across in mystical verse are of varied kinds. Mysticism or Mystical Literature celebrates divine love in terms of images drawn from earthly love.

Belief in the unseen is a universal characteristic of mysticism and religion. In fact, mysticism and religion are integrally linked, though there have been many mystics who steered clear of creeds and dogmas. The religious and the mystic shade into each other in what is taken to be religious mysticism, practised by those in whom mystical temper and religious devotion reinforce each other. One such mystic is Puran Singh. Spirituality and man's quest for the ultimate are two pillars on which the edifice of his poetry rests as we know mysticism in religion and philosophy are basically based upon an individual's inner experience.

Puran Singh was a prophet at heart. A prophet and a mystic and a visionary idealist who created in his poetry a world entirely his own- spiritualistic, infinite, inimitable and everlasting. His is a world of thoughts, ideas and visions. Love and devotion are the supreme governing emotions in his verse. His work is, in essence, a fusion of literature and philosophy.

Randhawa, paying a tribute to Puran Singh, writes:

He is a mystic, who, in the madness of his ecstasy lifts his head among the stars and dances with the sun and the moon. His poetry is like an adventure into a strange land: a mystical autobiography of the poet. Puran Singh is a spiritual mystic.

Puran Singh, Jeevni Ate Kavita

Transcendentalists and mystics like Puran Singh believe that one's perception of the world is only a reflection of one's spirit. They emphasize individual's search for Truth, all the while rejecting society's current social codes.

Puran Singh is essentially a spiritual poet and in his literary creations, poetry, mysticism, spirituality, transcendentalism mingle. Mysticism is an experience that has a spiritual meaning which is not apparent to the senses nor to the intellect. Thus mysticism, an insight into the real nature of man, God and the Universe, is attained through one's intuition. The mystic believes in the unity of God and man, man and nature and God and the universe. To a mystic, time and space are unreal, since both can be overcome by man by spiritual conquest. Evil, too, is unreal, since God is present everywhere. Man communicates with his soul in a mystical experience. The Divine dwells in the inmost being of man and cannot be extinguished. It is the inner light, the concealed witness, that which endures and is imperishable from birth to birth, untouched by death, decay or destruction.

Mysticism is invariably linked to some religious faith. Puran Singh, being a disciple of Sikh Gurus, believes in Sikh Philosophy and mysticism. His idiom is truly in accordance with his philosophy transcendentalism, of transcending the seemingly beautiful world.

Philosophy is merely a weed; we have no need of it when we are alive with the inspiration of love. It is when inspiration leaves us that religion assumes the form of ethics, philanthropy, humanity, churches, masques and temples, hospitals and orphanages, because inspiration needs no crutches. The earth is the temple with the whole sky as its roof.

The Spirit of Oriental Poetry

Puran Singh, being a disciple of Sikhism, strictly adheres to its philosophy. The Saint is completely, continuously and inwardly raised above the gross worlds of filth and dirt and desire and self and feels very light. His eyes are always pulled upwards. The souls of the Regions of Spiritual freedom fill him with Grace, his wishes are kinetic. He can best do good to man from there Puran Singh says, that those whom 'He' favours are the lucky ones. Spiritual character of man is the mere effect of the inflow of inspiration. The dull academic unity of all things does not interest him, it matters little to a living man; whether the Ultimate Reality is one or many. 'Simrin' when accumulated, has an alchemical effect on the personality of man and even on natural objects. According to the Sikh, Simrin is the feeling which gathers itself grain by grain and suddenly gives birth to the highest arts of celestializing nature and man. Such ecstasy is rare and comes to a lucky man whose perfect moment has arrived. Practice of any higher truth is impossible without personal contact with Heaven, with the Mysterious Beautiful. A spontaneous personal contact between God and man is simple as the running of rivers and their confluences, to glow with passionate peace in this fatal storm of suffering, struggling matter, to true spirituality of the Great spirit. Puran Singh insists on the grace of kindness in man and bringing together as far as possible a suitable set of conditions under which the inner virtue might be maintained. Universal Sympathy is to be a natural radiation of a true man, as coolness is of the shade of an umbrageous tree. The inner virtue is to be ever husbanded more and, more by 'dropping wholly the I-ness'. Puran Singh completely surrenders to the Guru and opines that the Guru rises up and takes religion, the ethics of man and converts them into a song, a hymn : 'Music is the shower of amrita'.

"Man must feel the music of being and on those attitudes there is no 'other'.

The Guru is of the Christian and the Jew, of the Muslim and the Hindu.

His disciples are Universal.

His disciple is a soldier whose life is for the service of all humanity.

And yet the disciple's love that prompts service of humanity

is his intense love for the person of the Guru.

Without his central light round which the Sikh revolves,

his dedication becomes a sin, his service disease, a curse."

Spirit of the Sikh, Part-II, Volume Two

The culture created by the Guru is in one word, the all-mind divine culture. The Sikh, like the Guru, like sunlight and air and water belongs to all: he is culture embodied, love incarnate, sweet fragrance of humanity that kindled dead souls. All philosophies of life are fulfilled in the devoted practice of Nam, says Puran Singh. His word has the expanse and mystery of all time and space.

The animal in man is never subdued by the synthetic, artificial and dramatic refinement of minds and this animal is the same, whether it is the East or the West. The inner man, the God in man, rather, bows to the simple and sweet humanity of a saint and loves to clothe himself, in the glory of love whenever it is possible, and this inner man has the same shape all over the world. The soul shines on all features, on all colours, as does the sun. The soul is more than the intellect and the will. The Guru merges the intellect into intuition - transcendentalism - and the soul, the man feels that without this relation - whether visible or invisible - all his intellect becomes a branch from a tree. Rapture felt within, sensation realized within, is true knowledge. To praise the Creator is the first and most exquisite fragrance of the Guru. The only cure for the utter futility of physical life towards which your outgoing senses drive you, and finally uproot you out of the infinite as trees are uprooted by a storm, is your living deep down in the dignity of the divine and the beautiful and breathing the sympathetic spirit of the great mystery of life and death. (SOTS Part-II)

Puran Singh is a poet who embodies all these attributes: love, inspiration, spiritualism, mysticism, intuition, transcendentalism and a whole hearted disciple of his Guru throughout his life. For him, the Guru is the very pole-star with a whole number of stars of the Sikh life going round him. The past and future both lie in His Guru who cut off a portion from the dead stock of Indian Philosophy and infuse a new life into it.

The fact is that Puran Singh's philosophy is based wholly on his own spiritual experiences, on the flights of his own fancy and on the experiments he made to comprehend the Infinite Reality. Sense, intellect and intuition provide parts of the process which imparts knowledge to the individual. The sources can be empirical, conceptual and spiritual worlds. The role of intuition is to unify the elements of knowledge and to enlighten the self. Its insights lead one to have glimpses of the Ultimate Truth, ordinarily hidden from view. These are the glimpses that constitute mystical awareness and produce states of aesthetic enjoyment, ecstasy or blissfulness:

The Union is in the feeling in the soul.

Not in mind or in body.

The world is an inn on the road to perfection.

Puran Singh was highly progressive, much beyond his time. He was a mystic, a spiritualist, a thinker, a forward looking personality, a philosopher, a global writer who thought of mankind as a whole, a humanist, and above all an ascetic. Puran Singh remained throughout his life changeable, fluid and active. To him the very act of living resolves and assimilates all contradictions. He had the gift of 'dying' moving from the ordinary to the deeply meditative state. Because of so many influences upon his life of which, whatever he found ennobling and striking, he adopted but without being canonical. Herein lies his relevance and significance in the Modern Era. Perhaps his revolutionary ideas are more relevant today than they were before. Puran Singh's poetry is an ocean of passion in which pearls of transcendental truths are lying scattered. Transcendental poetry, as the term itself suggests, is timeless. It is for all times. It gives expression to poets' incursions into the absolute truths which never get irrelevant. As long as man finds himself lost in the material world, as long as:

The world is too much with us

Getting and spending we lay

Waste our powers

Little we see in nature

That is ours,

Wordsworth: The World is too much with us

transcendental awareness remains the only solace for mankind.

In the modern age, when so called globalization has captivated the minds of the thinkers of the whole world, Puran Singh's poetry, with its message of universal love, fraternal feelings and going back to Nature, is a panacea. Globalization is a device to overcome distances. But Puran Singh's poetry preaches universalism which obliterates both distance and time. It depicts man as one with Nature, as a small part of the whole universe: from the beginning to end. He says in *The Spirit Of Oriental Poetry*, "At that Supreme moment, we shall see the vanity of life in the vulgar to-days; the emptiness of social gatherings; the poisonous nature of modern happiness, and the vulgar fashions and gross appetites that drive every man every hour from solitude to the noisy pig-sticking oh common life."

Economic trends like Capitalism, Free Trade and Globalization come and go but man's quest for the Ultimate is everlasting. Puran Singh's poetry has a perennial appeal. It evokes a pleasant response in the mind of the modern man. It sings of man's joys of being one with Nature, it shall always remain a source of inspiration to man's soul which, being tired of worldly concerns, is desperately seeking spiritual peace.

What use these burning mansions of gold of the lark.

Where everyday a new fire, a strange fear consumes the Soul!

Better, be the mud huts in the Kingdom of Rama,

Where with but a few beans for his daily subsistence,
Man sleeps in the Peace of Righteousness.

The Spirit of Oriental Poetry

REFERENCES

1. Dhar, A.N. *Mysticism in Literature*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers, 1985
2. Diwana, Mohan Singh, *Sikh Mysticism*, Tej Printing Press, Katra Sher Singh, 1964
3. Kasel, Kirpal Singh Nanada, Satinder Singh, *Aatma Di Kavita*, Delhi, Aarsi Publisher, 2006
4. Maini, D.S. "Puran Singh" *Puran Singh Studies*, Volume 1, April 1979, Patiala, Punjabi University, Patiala
5. ---"Puran Singh Toward A Whitmanesque Vision", *Puran Singh Studies*, Volume 1, Jan. 1979
6. Singh, Puran. "Spirit Of The Sikh", Patiala, Punjabi University, 1978-93 (5 Volumes)
7. ---- *The Spirit Of Oriental Poetry*, Patiala, Punjabi University, 1980
8. Virk, H.S., Prof. Puran Singh, Scientist, Poet and Philosopher, Chandigarh, Tarlochan Publishers, 2008
9. Singh, Avtar. *Philosophical Perspectives Of Sikhism*, Patiala, Punjabi University, 1998
10. Randhawa, M.S. *Puran Singh, Jeevni Ate Kavita*, New Delhi, Sahitya Akademy, 2009