

THE SAGA OF A SAGE - SHIV SINGH

Dr. Anju Bala*

“Engaged in work a day life, I wander in a dreamland of artistic creation: when in my bed I lie, I begin to sculpt, when I fall to sleep my sculpture is done and the destination I reached. Every day starts with a painting or a sculpture this setting out to unexplored regions, when the mysteries and wonders are revealed in completion, my destination is attained.”

Shiv Singh

Shiv Singh (b. 1938, village Bassi Gulam Hussain, Hoshiarpur - d. 2015, Panchkula) contributed in nurturing the art scenario of Chandigarh immensely. He was a bright alumnus of Govt. School of Art and Craft, Shimla who earned an international fame. He remained in touch with his mother land and his oeuvre gives the glimpses of the same. His sculptures are the expressions of the experiences of his life which he carved and sculpted on various mediums. For him Mother Nature was a great source of inspiration.

Shiv Singh completed his education in art from Shimla and Chandigarh respectively. From 1958 to 1963 he studied in School of Arts and Crafts, Shimla but later when the School shifted from Shimla to Chandigarh in 1961 he also came to Chandigarh to complete his study in Government College of Art located in Sector 10 (at that time it was known as Government School of Art). While studying in Shimla he went through all the five sections of craft as the part of syllabus which were jewellery, wood work, metal ivory inlay, metal work and black smithy.¹

He completed his diploma and immediately joined Sainik School in Kapurthala as an Art Teacher in 1963. In the year 1968 he was awarded with a scholarship by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany for advanced studies and research in the field of art for three years and when he came back to the country he was full of new zeal and contemporary ideas.² Singh was a person of versatile qualities. He was not only active as an artist but was also the part of the art academic of that time. For instance, he was the member of Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi from 1972 to 1982 and was also one of the founder members of the Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh. This eminent sculptor was also the Chairperson of the Chandigarh Lalit Kala Akademi from 1999 to 2005.³ During his tenure the Akademi while conducting its regular activities also acted for specific causes. Two important art exhibitions were organized, one exhibition entitled ‘Homage to Kargil Heroes’, from 20th to

* Assistant Professor, Department of Fine Arts, Guru Gobind Singh College for Women, Sector- 26, Chandigarh.

25th July, 1999, in which the aim was to raise funds for contribution to the 'Army Central Welfare Fund' and through this endeavour the Akademi raised a sum of Rs. 65,000/-.⁴ The second exhibition was held in 2005 and the purpose was to generate money for the Tsunami Tragedy Fund. This saw an important contribution by Chandigarh artists who gave their works to be sold at greatly reduced prices, almost half the market price, to generate money for the fund. Some of the contributors were Braham Prakash, Malkit Singh and Viren Tanwar among many others and 150 works were put on display. The money thus generated was donated for the rehabilitation of Tsunami victims.⁵

Shiv Singh's maiden exhibition was in the library of Panjab University, Chandigarh in January, 1965 which was visited and appreciated by the eminent personalities of the city such as Pierre Jeanerette, M S Randhawa, Mulk Raj Anand (the founder of the department of Fine Arts, now known as the department of Art History and Visual Arts), B. N. Goswamy. He had not only exhibited in India but also in the West in solo and group shows.⁶

Shiv Singh had been the legatee of a number of prizes. One of them is the National Award in sculpture in 1979 and the Punjab Arts Council also honoured him as a leading artist in the same year. He bagged the President of India's Silver Plaque for the Best Exhibit in Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi in 1982.⁷ In 1988, the Governor Punjab honoured him for his contribution in the field of art. In 1991, for his metal sculptures he bagged a Silver Plaque at the Surajkund Craft Mela which was presented to him by the Governor of Haryana. Then an art society named Prakash Kala Society from Mohali and Art India Organisation, Ludhiana honoured him in the same year. After bagging numerous awards and prizes in 2011 Doordarshan Jalandhar honoured him as a senior artist of Punjab and the then Chief Minister of Punjab also honoured him at the state function in Amritsar on 15th August, 2011 in Amritsar.

He was primarily a sculptor who sculpted in multiple mediums. Besides this, he was also a painter and designer. For Shiv Singh source of inspiration could be anything and everything that you see in your daily life. As his childhood was spent in a village and thus resulting he was always connected with his village, its surrounding, nature and atmosphere. Nature in the form of flowering buds, the shoots of plants with their leaves and tendrils, the mounds etc. had been a great source of an inspiration for Singh since his childhood. It was only nature which taught him that art cannot be learnt from books. It is only the bounty of Mother Nature that gives him inspiration to work through her beauty and also nurtured his aesthetic taste and artistic creativity. According to him anything in nature that one can see, touch and feel is a source of inspiration. For him whatever is there between earth and sky is

an inspiration. In his words anything can inspire him to work from the blades of grass to a huge mountain anything can inspire him to sculpt.

Singh initially worked in materials such as clay, sand and grass later he moved on to wood and later on more permanent materials such as stone and metal, the last of many types such as copper, brass and steel and many more materials. But from the last 24 years till his last art piece of work he used only light metals as his medium such as steel. His expressions are very different. In his words stone is very difficult to handle and there is lot of repetition in carving of a stone sculpture. He recognised the nature of the material and its possibilities and the limitations it provides to an artist and how one has to adapt to different ways of handling different materials and execute the expressions and feelings with that medium. While working in steel he gave twisted form to the metal and changed it into different thickness and thinness and form and shapes-sometimes in cylindrical bars and sometimes times he flattened the metal bars in order to represent different stages of growth. The steel sculptures which are shaped in bars seem to grow suggesting either budding or an evolved mature stage of growing. Linear quality is the main feature of his sculptures as he used bars and rods of various sizes in his sculptures.⁸

Shiv Singh has not only worked as a sculptor but has also worked in other mediums such as water colours and drawings. His exhibition "The Art of Tantra" comprised of works in water colours on handmade paper. For him watercolours are the best way to express freedom and movement. In this exhibition his works seemingly presented the pulsating visuals of sexual union. He has used vibrant colours with a continuing effect of rhythmic lines. With the use of warm colours such as red, yellow, orange he has presented the secrets of Mother Nature. According to Shiv Singh, *Bindu* is the nucleus of all creation that it originates with the mixing of male and female powers together. Shiv Singh talking about his series says, "It is all about balancing and playing with space. The visual impact is not complete if the balance is not there; even the empty spaces signify the process of life."⁹

An artist who has studied the work of master sculptors such as Henry Moore Singh early on came to the realization that even someone like Moore worked in different materials but his style evolved in such a manner that his work is easily recognizable. Singh has succeeded to a large extent in achieving the same in the use of metal, primarily. During his late sixties in his rendering the forms adapted the shape from nature the tubular forms reach up to the sky. In his words, "I never need to copy from the others; in fact, nature has so many things to inspire me. To become a good artist one has to do regular work and practice only then anyone could do better work with experience and practice. Any art form is the result of

regular practice”. All of this has been clearly seen in his works and his life. Artists have different kinds of subjects. For him seeing is very important. If you have an eye to see then you can make many things otherwise you cannot create anything. One has to know the basics; with that anyone can understand art very well. Initially artists worked in realistic style but later on they used different expressions just because of their practice. Without exercise one cannot achieve anything in life.

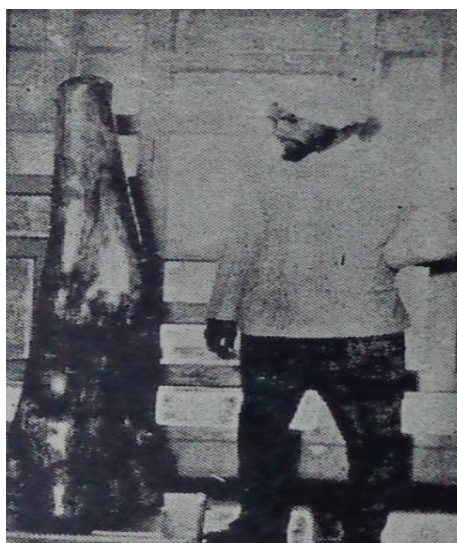
He retired as a Professor from Government Home Science College, Sector 10, Chandigarh in 1996. Shiv Singh dedicated 50 years of his life as an artist and his death is a great loss to the city. In the words of Prem Singh, “He will be remembered for his meticulous sculptures in wood and metal, which, over the decades, have attained a distinct identity in the world of art. His inspiration was rooted in nature.”¹⁰

A number of scholars and art critics have written about Shiv Singh’s work and his facility in various mediums. After inaugurating his show in the year of 1965 M.S. Randhawa sent him a letter congratulating him for his works and also stated - “Your work is promising and your achievement is already significant. If you continue to work hard you are bound to make a name.”¹¹ On the other hand, B N Goswamy also discussed about his maturity in using different mediums and sizes. He said, “Over the years Shiv Singh has shifted his attention from one material to another and back, varied his scale from the very small scale to the monumental. But his concerns have remained much the same clarity, preoccupation with pure form, achieving a measure of lightness and elegance.”¹² Shiv Singh passed away on 26th June 2015 in Chandigarh.

His sculptures have been installed at various places in the city as well as in Punjab, Haryana, Baroda, Mohali and Delhi and also in Germany.¹³ His works are on display at the following places: National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, National Academy of Art (Lalit Kala Akademi), New Delhi, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Sector 10, Punjab Kala Bhawan, Chandigarh, Leisure Valley, Chandigarh, Fine Arts Museum in Museum of Art History and Visual Arts, Panjab University, Chandigarh, State Museum, Shimla, Hack Museum, Ludwigshafen, Glaub Art Museum, Koln (Germany), Compass Art Gallery Glasgow, Scotland, Haryana State Tourism Resort, Rohtak, Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana, Technological Museum, Bangalore, North Zone Cultural Centre, Patiala and Chandigarh, Rajhans Hotel (Surajkund), Regional Centre, Chennai, Punjab Bhawan, New Delhi, Monumental Sculpture on the occasion of Silver Jubilee 1986 IIT Kanpur, Punjab Art Heritage, (ApeeJay College)

Jalandhar, Monumental Sculpture '92 on Centenary of Punjab Police Academy at Phillaur, Petro Chemicals, Baroda and many other places.

Shiv Singh, also known as “man in black”, had shared his thoughts in this respect in the following words, “My village has 50 per cent Muslims and an equal number of Sikhs. I grew up in the company of Sufi saints who used to wear black *cholās* and one Mauni baba who wore orange all the time. Both the colours became part of my identity and by the time I was doing my five-year diploma course, my wardrobe consisted of clothes only in black and orange.” This dress code remained with him throughout his life. In an interview with Singh he says about his attire, “I am the black man, not the black sheep.”¹⁴



(Plate 1) Shiv Singh¹⁵



(Plate 2) Family Wood (1967)¹⁶



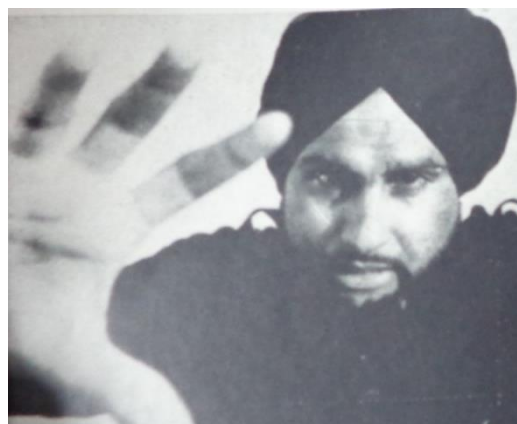
(Plate 3) Metal Flower II (1978)¹⁷



(Plate 4) Environmental Sculpture¹⁸



(Plate 5) Wonder,¹⁹ Metal (1967)



(Plate 6) Shiv Singh²⁰

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ An interview with Shiv Singh on 24.12.2013.
- ² He was one of the youngest artists of the city who has achieved this honour. Kaur, Amarjot, "Recalled to Life", *The Tribune*, 27th June, 2015.
- ³ V.N. Singh and Viren Tanwar were the Vice President and Secretary of the Akademi.
- ⁴ *Cat: A catalogue based on the Works of Shiv Singh published by 'FACE INDIA' (Foundation for Art, Culture and Education) 2008.*
- ⁵ An amount of Rs. 1.35 Lakh was collected and was contributed to the Tsunami victims. "Exhibition opens for Tsunami relief", *The Times of India*, 16th January, 2005. "Art Lovers pour aid for Tsunami, *The Tribune*, 16th January, 2005. But according to his bio data on the website <http://www.lalitkalachandigarh.com/artist-detail-68.html> retrieved on 02.09.2015 the amount was 1.45 lakh.
- ⁶ Shiv Singh and Sohan Qadri were the contemporary artists. Both went to Denmark, Germany together and exhibited their works there. Shiv Singh held more than 65 solo shows not only in India but including Germany, Denmark, Canada, Sweden, Scotland and the United Kingdom. Both of them went to Germany together and exhibited in number of group shows also there. In 1971 Singh had organised an exhibition in Helsingborg with Sohan Qadri. *Cat: Vernissage Galerie d'art Moderne, Helsingborg, 26 mars- 18 april, 1971.*
- ⁷ Singh, Nonika, "Nature's Child who breathed Life into Metal", *The Tribune*, 27 June, 2015.
- ⁸ An interview with Shiv Singh on 24.12.2013.
- ⁹ "Shiv Singh's Tantra," *The Tribune*, 23rd September, 2005.
- ¹⁰ Sharma, Sarika, "Shiv Singh and his Legacy of Rhythmic Lines", *The Times of India*, 28th June, 2015.
- ¹¹ A letter to Shiv Singh from M S Randhawa dated 6th February, 1965. I was able to avail this information in a letter attached in the file Art Correspondence- XXV, 1965 from the Archival section of Library of Government Museum and Art Gallery, Sector-10, Chandigarh.
- ¹² *Cat: Shiv Singh: Exhibition of Art Objects*, Shridharani Art Gallery, New Delhi, 30th December 1988 to 4th January, 1989.
- ¹³ *Cat: A catalogue based on the Works of Shiv Singh published by 'FACE INDIA' (Foundation for Art, Culture and Education) 2008.* In New Delhi one of his sculptures has been installed in the premises of National Gallery of Modern Art and another at the Lalit Kala Akademi.
- ¹⁴ An interview with Shiv Singh on 24.12.2013.
- ¹⁵ An image from catalogue Loose Group- 1967
- ¹⁶ Image Courtesy Government Museum and Art Gallery, Sector 10, Chandigarh.
- ¹⁷ <http://www.lalitkalachandigarh.com/page/shiv-singh>
- ¹⁸ A sculpture by Shiv Singh installed in the premises of Government Museum and Art Gallery, Sector- 10, Chandigarh.
- ¹⁹ Image Courtesy Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh.
- ²⁰ An image from the catalogue 1980- 81 Art Festival Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Exhibition of Paintings, Sculptures, Graphics and Designs, from 27 Dec 1980 to 3 Jan, 1981).