

Classic Poetry Series

Kunwar Narayan

- poems -

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Kunwar Narayan(19 September 1927 -)

Kunwar Narain (????? ??????) is a poet and a presence in Indian literature, often regarded as the leading living poet in Hindi. He has read and traveled widely, written over the last six decades and is among the few intellectuals who combine an international modern sensibility with a grounding in their country's cultural and imaginative history. Linked to the New Poetry movement, he publishes selectively and is characteristically polite. He read English literature and publishes in Hindi but also plays with English and Urdu. Earlier, he lived in Lucknow where his house was a centre of literary meets and classical performances. He now lives in Delhi with his wife and son. Influences on him have been diverse, from the Indian epics and Upanishads to Kabir and Amir Khusro, history and mythology to Buddhism and Marxism, Kafka and Cavafy to Khalil and Gandhi.

 Life

Born on 19 September 1927, in Faizabad district, Uttar Pradesh Kunwar Narayan passed his M.A. examination in English Literature from Lucknow University in 1951. Married to Bharati Goenka in 1966, he has a son Apurva, born in 1967.

Political leaders Narendra Deva and Acharya Kripalani were key literary influences and he gives formative importance to his first visit to Europe, Russia and China in 1955 and meetings with poets like Nazim Hikmet, Rumi, Anton Slonimskiy and Pablo Neruda. Later, his translations of the French symbolist poets like Mallarmé and Valéry, and then of poets like Cavafy and Borges, contributed to his poetic development. His work covers varied genres—poetry, epic poetry, short stories, literary criticism, translations, essays on world cinema, history and Indian classical music, and articles of versatile cultural and human interest. He has been translated nationally and internationally, and his many honours include the Jnanpith Award, Sahitya Akademi Award, Kabir Samman, Vyasa Samman, Lohia Samman, Shaloka Samman, Warsaw University's honorary medal and Italy's Premio Feronia for distinguished international author (a prestigious honour given for the first time to an Indian writer and previously awarded to authors like Germany's Günther Grass, South Africa's JM Coetzee, China's Gao Xingjian, Syria's Adonis, Cuba's Roberto F Retamar, Palestine's Mahmoud Darwish, Iraq's Saadi Youssef, France's Michel Butor and Albania's Ismail Kadare).

Work

His oeuvre began with Chakravatyuh, his first poetry collection published in 1956,

a landmark in Hindi literature. About the same time, he co-edited Yug-Chétna, an avant-garde literary magazine. A little later in 1959, he was one of the poets in Tisra Saptak edited by Agyea. In 1961, his second poetry collection Parivésh: Hum-Tum came. Atmajayee, published in 1965, a short epic based on the Upanishadic character of Nachiketa, expresses some of the most fundamental metaphysical concerns and is widely recognised as a classic of Hindi literature.

His short story collection Akaron Ke As-Pas came in 1971 and is a lasting example of a poetic mind exploring the genre of fiction. In the poems of Apné Samné (1979), contemporary political and social ironies found a more pronounced place. After a long hiatus, his much-awarded collection of poems Koi Dusra Nahin was published in 1993. Aj Aur Aj Sé Pahlé, a collection of literary criticism (1999), Méré Sakshatkar, a collection of interviews (2000) and Sahitya Ké Kuchh Antar-Vishayak Sandarbh (2003), as also journals like Yug Chétna, Naya Pratik and Chhayana that he co-edited, and writings on cinema, art and history, reveal yet other aspects of his literary repertoire. In 2002, the poetry collection In Dino was published and, in 2008, his latest work, an epic poem Vajashrava Ké Bahané, has appeared, which while recalling the contextual memory of Atmajayi published forty years ago, is a chain of independent island-like poems. A selection of his poems in English translation, No Other World, by his son Apurva has appeared in 2010 from Rupa.

Awards and recognition

Hindustani Akademi Award (Atmajayee) 1971,
Prem Chand Award (Akaron Ke Aas-Pas) 1973,
Kumaran Asan Award (Apne Samne) 1982,
Tulsi Award (Apne Samne) 1982,
Hindi Sansthan Award (distinguished writing in Hindi) 1987,
Vyas Samman (Koi Doosra Naheen) 1995,
Bhavani Prasad Misra Award (Koi Doosra Naheen) 1995,
Shatdal Award (Koi Doosra Naheen) 1995,
Sahitya Akademi Award (Koi Doosra Naheen and overall literary contribution) 1995,
Lohia Award (overall contribution to Hindi literature) 2001,
Kabir Samman (highest all-India poetry award) 2001,
Honorary , of Rajarshi Purushottam Tandan Mukt Vishvavidyalay, Allahabad, 2004,
Medal of Warsaw University, Poland (overall literary achievement) 2005,
Shalaka Samman (Hindi Academy's highest honour), Delhi, 2006,
Premio Feronia, Italy (distinguished foreign author), 2006,
Jnanpith Award (considered as the highest literary award in India), for overall

contribution in Hindi literature, 2005

Padma Bhushan the third highest civilian award in the Republic of India for
'Literature & Education', 2009

'Pune Pandit' Award (Scholar of Pune Award), by the Art & Music Foundation,
India for outstanding contribution in Indian literature, 2011

A Poem

Around ten o'clock every day
the same incident recurs.
The same people, in the same way
leaving their wives and children alone
come out of their homes.
Its no earthquake.
While its growing dark,
the same people
return
to the same homes,
worn out, defeated
appareled in gloom.

I know
this way the earth won't rock.
Nothing will happen this way.
These people are sick and stiff
because of some other reason.
All these
repeatedly, reaching the same conclusion
already reached;
will realise
that falsehood is a fine art
and each man an artist;
maddened through trying to give some meaning
gladly
not to the reality
but to his reality.

Now and then
while coming back home in the evening;
the frightening glimpses
of an abstract art
burst from the sky
in my mind.

As if
grinding together
all the discoloured men and things,

someone had spread them on a flat surface.
And against the apparent risk of blood
all the suppressed colours
of man
had emerged on their own.

[Translated by Apu Vajpeyi and ton]

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Bachche Ki Khushi

Kunwar Narayan

Ek Ajeeb Din

Kunwar Narayan

Laapata Ka Huliya

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On The Eight Floor

I live on the eighth floor
in a small flat
all alone.

A pair of windows in the flat
open outward.
Its terrifying.

I've put strong grills
on the windows.

Not that I apprehend danger
from outside. At this height
none dare intrude from outside.

The danger lies within me
terrible things happening around -
this isolation and boredom -
could any day force me
to jump out of the window.

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