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Sahitya Akademi



India International Centre

invite you to

meet the author

Shiv K. Kumar



I have written some fiction (short stories and novels) and a play, but my first love is poetry.

— Shiv K. Kumar

A poet, novelist, short-story writer, playwright, translator, critic and educationist, Shiv K. Kumar has given a new dimension to creative writing in English. Born in Lahore, in 1921, Kumar graduated from Forman Christian College, Lahore and took his Ph.D in English from the University of Cambridge, with a thesis on the Impact of Henri Bergson on the Stream of Consciousness Novel in English. Taking up his career as an English lecturer, Kumar has taught at various universities in India as UGC National Lecturer, and many other universities abroad, in the UK, USA and Russia as a Visiting Professor of Literature.

"An authentic major voice," as acclaimed by *World Literature Written in English*, Shiv K. Kumar is an elected Fellow of the Royal Society of

Literature in Britain. He was also invited to participate in the Creative Writers' Forum at the University of Iowa. The Government of Australia invited him as its Cultural Visitor.

Dubbed as 'a late bloomer', Shiv K. Kumar shot into eminence as an Indian English poet, with the publication of his collection of poems *Articulate Silences* in his late forties. In fact, Kumar wrote his first poem "An Encounter with Death" when he lost his mother. The death of his mother, Kumar recalls, was "like the end of the world". He felt that "there was no other way to articulate his agony except through writing... It was a very traumatic moment in my life."

Author of six collections of poems, four novels, one play,



Sri Krishna Kant, Vice-President of India, releasing Kumar's English translation of the selection of Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Also seen is Sri I.K. Gujral, former Prime Minister of India.



With his Wife

one collection of short stories, a translation of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and several works of literary criticism, Kumar is a man of moods, and modes and his writing reflects this in its diversity of themes and forms. Much of his work reveals a mastery of both the confessional mode and ironic comment. Truth is self-discovery for him. He always tries to touch the inner beauty of the mind. Kumar rips open the hypocrisy of our systems, and satirises its decadent customs and postulates. Responding to those who call him a confessional poet, he says, "In tone and structure my poetry may be 'autobiographical', but the readers fail to comprehend that a poet often invents facts and experiences, camouflaging them as real and authentic, to achieve the readers' total participation."

Shiv K. Kumar believes that in order to make one's writing credible and authentic, the writer has to delve deep into his soul. His second collection of verse *Cobwebs in the Sun* (1974) demonstrates a "sophisticated manipulation of word and image", a chiselled sensibility and richness of articulation. The poems in *Subterfuges* (1976) are confessional in thematic content and tone. *Woodpeckers* is a collection of twenty-five poems

encompassing a wide variety of themes.

His poetry is essentially an expression of experience rather than intellect. His images are derived from various sources and at times achieve a kind of "visual-verbal dialectics." *Trapfalls in the Sky*, published in 1986, won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1987. *Wool-gathering* (1995) and *Thus Spake the Buddha* (2001) are his subsequent poetic collections. His recent poems under the title 'Losing My Way' await publication.

Kumar says that he is often misunderstood as being pre-occupied with sex. People do not realise that he is, in fact, debunking sex with a view to establishing the purity of love.

His novels *Bone's Prayer* (1979) and *Nude before God* (1983) explore the themes of joy in pain and of pain in joy culminating in transcendental bliss. Of *Nude before God*, Graham Greene says that it is a "most amusing book on a daring subject".

In 1947, Kumar migrated to Delhi as a refugee from Pakistan. The traumatic experience he underwent during Partition impelled him to write his novel *A River with Three Banks : The Partition of India : Agony and Ecstasy*. "The novel recreates, in a language that glows with fragrance and colour, not only the trauma that one associates with Partition, but also the love, compassion and forgiveness that it evoked in the midst of communal frenzy," observes Mulk Raj Anand. His fourth novel *Infatuation* is a story of a young Imam infatuated with a married Brahmin woman. This novel is commended as "fiction of extraordinary prowess."

Kumar's short stories are a continuing exploration into the mystery, the agony and the ultimate hopefulness of life.

The Last Wedding Anniversary is Kumar's only play. It was produced and enacted by Indian National Theatre. Kumar became "aware of the power of the spoken word", when the play was being enacted in the theatre.

Shiv K. Kumar believes in the unfettered freedom of creative imagination. He does not subscribe to any ideology—political, social or religious. But this does not mean that his creative writing is divorced from such human values as compassion, forgiveness, love and peace.

To those who ask him why he writes in English despite his origins in Urdu culture and Punjabi, his mother tongue, Kumar replies that every "writer chooses the medium that suits him; in fact, I may even say that often it is the medium that chooses the author."

Some of Kumar's poetic works have already been translated into many Indian languages. *The Journal of South Asian Literatures* (Michigan) brought out a special issue on his writings.

Recipient of several awards and honours, Kumar has been conferred with the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India for his valuable contribution to literature.

A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Poetry

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Subterfuges. New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1975.

Woodpeckers. London, Sidgwick Jackson, 1979.



Receiving the Sahitya Akademi award from the then President of the Sahitya Akademi, Dr. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya.

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Play

The Last Wedding Anniversary. Chennai, Macmillan, 1978. (Translated into Urdu as *Shadi ki Akhri Salgirah*) Published by Shero-Hikmat, Hyderabad, 1976.

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Shiv K. Kumar as a Post-Colonial Poet. B.K. Das, New Delhi, Atlantic, 2001.

"A Passage to Shiv K. Kumar." Prabhat K. Singh, New Delhi, Sarup & Sons (Forthcoming).



Teaching Creative Writing at the University of Oklahoma (Norman, USA), 1981

A CHRONOLOGY

1921	Born in Lahore	1979-80	Acting Vice-Chancellor, Hyderabad University
1943	Took his MA in English Literature from Forman Christian College, Lahore	1980	Member of the Jury for the Neustadt International Literary Prize, Norman, Oklahoma
1947	Migrated to Delhi from Pakistan	1983	Participated in Creative Writers' Forum, University of Iowa.
1965 & 67	Taught at Elmira College, New York	1984	Charles Holmes Poetry Prize
1970	His First Poetry Collection <i>Articulate Silences</i> published	1988	Received Sahitya Akademi Award for 1987 for his poetry collection <i>Trapfalls in the Sky</i> .
1972	UGC National Lecturer in English	2001	Padma Bhushan from the Government of India.
1977-78	Commonwealth Visiting Professor, University of Kent, UK		
1978	Fellow of Royal Society of Literature, London		



Receiving the Padma Bhushan from the President of India, Sri K.R. Narayanan at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi.