



Kunwar Narain

Select bio-details and bibliography in chronological order (approximate English translations of Hindi titles in brackets)

An outstanding poet and a stalwart presence in Indian literature, Kunwar Narain is often regarded as the leading living poet in Hindi. He has read and travelled 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 a characteristically polite presence. 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 Ghālib and Gandhi. Early in life, political leaders Narendra Dev and Acharya Kriplani 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, Anton Słonimskie 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 poems, 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 *Sahitya Akademi Award*, *Kabir Samman*, *Vyasa Samman*, *Lohia Samman*, *Shalaka Samman*, Warsaw University's honorary medal and Italy's *Premio Feronia* for distinguished international author, a prestigious honour given for the first time to any 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 Kadaré.

His oeuvre began with *Chakravyūh*, his first poetry collection published in 1956, a landmark in Hindi literature. About the same time, he co-edited *Yug-Chétnā*, an avant-garde literary magazine. A little later in 1959, he was one of the poets in *Tīsrā Saptak* edited by Agyeya. In 1961, his second poetry collection *Parivēsh: Hum-Tum* came. *Ātmajayee*, published in 1965, a short epic based on the Upanishadic character of Nachiketā, expresses some of the most fundamental metaphysical concerns and is widely recognised as a classic of Hindi literature. His short story collection *Ākāron Ke Ās-Pās* came in 1971, is a lasting example of a poetic mind exploring the genre of fiction. In the poems of *Apné Sāmné* (1979), contemporary political and social ironies found a more pronounced place. A long hiatus later, his much-awarded collection of poems, *Koī Dūsrā Nahīn* was published in 1993. *Āj Aur Āj Sé Pahlé*, a collection of literary criticism (1999), *Méré Sākshātkār*, a collection of interviews (2000) and *Sāhitya Ké Kuchh Antar-Vishayak Sandarbh* (2003), as also journals like *Yug Chétna*, *Naya Pratik* and *Chhayana* that he co-edited, and varied 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 *Vājashravā Ké Bahāné*, has appeared, which while recalling the contextual memory of *Ātmajayī* 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 also appeared this year from Rupa.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Poetry ***Chakravyūh*** (*Circular Siege*), 1956. Radhakrishan, Delhi (first published by Rajkamal Prakashan).

Tisrā Saptak (*Third Heptad*), seven poets, ed. Agyeya, 1959. Bharatiya Jnanpith, Delhi.
Parivēsh: Ham-Tum (*Surroundings: Us-You*), 1961. Vani Prakashan, Delhi (first published by Bharti Bhandar, Allahabad).
Apnē Sāmnē (*In Front of Us*), 1979. Rajkamal Prakashan, Delhi.
Koī Dūsrā Nahīn (*No One the Other*), 1993. Rajkamal Prakashan, Delhi.
In Dino (*These Days*), 2002. Rajkamal Prakashan, Delhi.

- Epic Poems *Ātmajayī* (*Self-Conqueror*), based on the Upanishadic episode of *Nachikētā* in *Kathopnishad*, 1965. Bharatiya Jnanpith, Delhi.
Vājashravā Kē Bahānē (*On Vajashrava's Pretext*), independent poems linked to *Ātmajayī*'s context, 2008. Bharatiya Jnanpith.
- Fiction *Ākāron Kē Ās-Pās* (*Near-about shapes*), a collection of short stories, 1973. Radhakrishan Prakashan, Delhi.
- Criticism *Āj Aur Āj Sē Pahlē* (*Today and Before Today*), 1998. Rajkamal Prakashan, Delhi.
Méré Sākshātkār (*My Interviews*), interviews given by Kunwar Narain, ed. Vinod Bhardwaj, 1999. Kitabghar Prakashan, Delhi.
Sāhitya Kē Kuchh Antar-Vishayak Sandarbh (*Some Interdisciplinary Contexts of Literature*), XIV Samvatsar Lecture, 2003. Sahitya Akademi.
- Translations Selected poems of, and essay on, **Constantine Cavafy**, 'Tanāv', 1986 and **Jorge-Luis Borges**, 'Tanāv', 1987.
Selected poems of **Stéphane Mallarmé**, **Tadeusz Różewicz**, **Derek Walcott**, **Zbigniew Herbert**, **Anna Świrszczyńska**, etc
- Compilations **Kunwar Nārāin: Sansār-I** (*World: Select writings of Kunwar Narain*), ed. Yatindra Mishra, 2002. Vani Prakashan, Delhi.
Kunwar Nārāin: Upasthīti-II (*Presence: Select articles on Kunwar Narain and his writings*), ed. Y Mishra, 2002. Vani Prakashan.
Kunwar Nārāin: Chunī Huī Kavīṭāyein (*Selected Poems*), ed. Suresh Saili, 2007. Medha Books, Delhi.
Kunwar Nārāin: Pratinidhī Kavīṭāyein (*Representative Poems*), ed. Purshottam Agarwal, 2008. Rajkamal Prakashan, Delhi.

Poems, stories, essays, criticism, and writings on cinema, music, art and history, have also appeared in several journals and anthologies. Works on the poet and translations into national and international languages have been published in journals, anthologies and independent collections. A fuller bibliography is available.

PERSONAL PARTICULARS

● Born 19 September 1927 ● M.A. in English Literature, Lucknow University, 1951 ● Married Bharati Goenka in 1966. Son Apurva born in 1967
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AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

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 D.Litt. of Rajarshi Purushottam Tandan Mukht 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.

SELECTED FOREIGN TRANSLATIONS

Modern Hindi Poetry: An Anthology, ed. Vidya N. Misra, 1965, Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington & London. (English translation by Leonard Nathan & H M Guy)
Tokyo University Journal, No. 7, Dec. 1972, Hindi Dept., Tokyo Univ. of Foreign Studies, Nishigahara, Kita-ku, Tokyo (Japanese translation by Toshio Tanaka)
Der Ochsenkarren, Hindilyrik der siebziger und achtziger Jahre, Zusammenge stellt von Vishnu Khare & Lothar Lutze, Verlag Wolf Mersch, 1983 (German transl.)
Kunwar Narayan, Naciketa, A cura di Mariola Offredi, Plural Edizioni, Napoli. Collezione di Poesia I Cristalli, 1989. (Italian translation of *Atmajayee*)
The Golden Waist Chain: Modern Hindi Short Stories, ed. Sara Rai, 1990, Penguin. (English translation by Sara Rai)
TriQuarterly 77, Winter 1989/90, ed. Reginald Gibbons, 1990, Northwestern University, USA (English translation by Vinay Dharwadker)
Periplus: Poetry in Translation, eds. Daniel Weissbort & Arvind K. Mehrotra, 1993, Oxford Univ. Press. (English translations by Daniel Weissbort & the poet)
The Penguin New Writing in India, eds. Aditya Behl & David Nicholls, 1994, Penguin India, First published by Chicago Review (Vol. 38, Nos1 & 2), 1992
Survival, eds. Daniel Weissbort & Girdhar Rathi. Sahitya Akademi, India, 1994 (English translations by Daniel Weissbort & the poet)
The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry, eds. Vinay Dharwadker & A.K. Ramanujan, 1994, Oxford University Press (English translations)
Yatra 2: Writings from The Indian Subcontinent, General Ed.: Alok Bhalla, Eds. Nirmal Verma & U R Ananthamurthy, 1994, Indus (English trans., Alok Bhalla)
Living Literature: A Trilingual Documentation of Indo-German Literary Exchange, eds. Barbara Lotz and Vishnu Khare (German translations)
Gestures: Poetry from SAARC Countries, Edited by K. Satchidanandan, 1996 (Reprint 2001), Sahitya Akademi, India (English)
An Anthology of Modern Hindi Poetry, ed. Kailash Vajpeyi, 1998, Rupa & Co., India (English translations)
Dilli Mein Kavita, ed. Kailash Vajpeyi, translated into Russian by Varyam Singh, 1999, Sahitya Kala Parishad, Delhi (Russian translations)
Poeti hindi: Antologia del Novecento, A cura di Mariola Offredi, Casta Diva, Roma. 2000. Poesia, Collana diretta da Enrico D'Angelo (Italian translations)
Kunwar Narayan, Nessuno è altro, A cura di Roberta Sequi, Casta Diva, Roma. 2001. (Italian translation of *Koeē Doosra Nahin*)
Beyond Borders: An Anthology of SAARC Poetry, eds. Ashok Vajpeyi & Ajeet Cour, 2002, Academy of Fine Arts and Literature & Rainbow Publishers.
Hindi: Handpicked Fictions, Edited and translated by Sara Rai, 2003, Katha, Delhi. (English translations)
New Poetry in Hindi (Nayi Kavita): An anthology edited, translated and introduced by Lucy Rosenstein, 2003, Permanent Black, Delhi. (English translations)

Cracow Indological Studies Vol. 6, ed. Renaty Czekalskiej, Jagiellonian Univ., Kraków, 2005. (Polish translations, Renata Czekalska & Agnieszka Kuckiewicz-Fraś)

Kunwar Narain, Varco di ombre, a cura di Tullia Baldassarri Höger von Högersthal, edizione Mura, 2006 (Italian translation of selected poems)

Ik zag de stad, Moderne Hindi-poëzie, Vertaald en ingeleid door Lodewijk Brunt & Dick Plukker, Stichting India Instituut, Amsterdam, 2006 (Dutch translation)

Teaching on India in Central and Eastern Europe, eds. Danuta Stasik & Anna Trynkowska, Warsaw, 2007 (Polish translations by Danuta Stasik)

Kunwar Narain, Przez Słowa, Antologia pod redakcją Renaty Czekalskiej i Agnieszki Kuczkiewicz-Fraś, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków, 2007 (Polish translation)

Kunwar Narain. No Other World: Selected Poems, Translated by Apurva Narain, Rupa & Co., India, 2008. (English translation)

POSITIONS HELD

- Co-editor, *Yug-Chetna* (1956-61), *Naya Prateek* (1974-78) and *Chhayana* (1976-78)
- Ex-member, General Council, *UP Hindi Sansthan*, and Hindi Advisory Board, Government of India
- Vice-Chairman, *UP Sangeet Natak Akademi*, Lucknow (1976-78)
- Chairman, *Bhartendu Natya Kendra*, Lucknow (1977-79)
- Ex-Member, *Kendriya Audan Samiti*, Dept. of Secondary & Higher Education, Central Hindi Directorate, Government of India
- Founding Member, *Vimala Devi Foundation*, Ayodhya
- Member, Advisory Board, Central Institute of Hindi, Agra, Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India
- Member, Board of Trustees and Executive Board, National Book Trust of India

SELECT INTERNATIONAL LITERARY MEETS

- Visits to Europe, Russia and China; meetings with Nazim Hikmet, Anton Slonimiskie and Pablo Neruda, 1955
 - Seminars & readings at Stockholm, Gothenburg and Lund Universities, Sweden, 1987
 - Lectures on *Mythology and Modern Hindi Poetry*, Venice University; Poetry readings in the UK, Italy & USA, 1994
 - Lectures and poetry readings in Nepal; Stay in Cambridge; Poetry Reading in London, 1998
 - Literary conferences and poetry readings in Warsaw and Jagiellonian Universities, Poland, 1999 and 2001
 - Poetry readings and release of Italian translation of *Koee Doosra Naheen* at Arenzano (Genova), Italy, 2001
 - Poetry readings and participation in the SAARC conference, Lahore, Pakistan, 2003
 - Guest of Honour at the 50th Anniversary of the Department of Indological Studies, Warsaw University, Poland, 2005
 - Poetry readings at the International Festival 'Mediterranea', and release of Italian collection of poems, Rome, 2006
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