

13 December 1995



Sahitya Akademi

meet the author

Kedarnath Singh





Kedarnath Singh is among the luminaries of contemporary Indian poetry. His polyvocal, dialogic poems are known for their vital reverberations of racial memory, charged mythic consciousness and deep sensory perceptions. Kedar is a rooted poet, his poems are multi-layered and his craft is terse, so he does demand a close second reading. This does not mean that he is obscure. The silent, mysterious and magical presence of everyday realities in his poems are easy to relate to, and they pleasantly undercut the overt endorsement of logic and positivism in them.

Born at Chakia (Dalia) on 19 November, 1935 and educated primarily at Benaras, Kedar taught at a string of U. P. colleges, wrote excellent books of poetry, essays and criticism till he finally settled down with all academic distinctions as Professor and Head, Centre of Indian Languages at Jawaharlal Nehru University in 1976.

His first few years as a perceptive pupil at the village school gave him the rich storehouse of sensuous images and also the folk and mythic consciousness that his poems

are known for. The feel of the small village river, the tastes and flavours, echoes and sensations of the native village stayed with him as he entered the world of letters of Benaras which was then the epicentre of Indian art and culture. There he got associated with the Progressive Writers' Movement.

The formative influence of luminaries like Hazariprasad Dwivedi blessed him with the right kind of vision to place both tradition and modernism in a proper perspective. In Benaras itself he came in close contact with Trilochan Shastri who determined a different vision of realism in him and also a strong sense of rhythm in his language. Another senior fellow writer whom he came in close contact with was Prof. Namawar Singh. The fusion of tradition and modernity that determines the character of Benaras as a whole in its totality influenced the poet to a great extent.

The simultaneous influence of Paul Elluard and others settled him down as a craft-conscious, humanism experimental poet who soon won the acclaim of both the contemporaries and the seniors like Agyeya. The poems that appeared in *Prateek* and *Teesara Saptak* and later on in his first anthology of poems, called *Abhi, Bilkul Abhi*, are lyrics of a completely new order. Parallel to the urban tradition of New Poetry, he raised a poetic structure which had a beautiful blend of both the rural and the urban sensibilities.

After a long, meditative, meaningful silence came

Zameen Pak Rahi Hai which practically revolutionised Hindi poetic idiom and acted as a trendsetter. His next anthology called *Yahan Se Dekho* bore a further witness to his immense poetic talent in widely acclaimed poems like "Benaras" and "Toota Hua Truck".

The fourth anthology called *Akaal Mein Saras* fetched him the Sahitya Akademi Award. It unravels racial memories on an exquisite philosophical plane. This philosophical vision deepens down further in the recently published *Uttar Kabeer aur Anya Kavitaen*. The note of displacement in some poems of this collection establishes a new kind of relationship with the folk life. Most of these poems are deeply embedded with a strong rope of interrogation, which leads to a pleasant blend of thought and feel-

ing. His long poem called *Bagh* is in press. It has been modelled after the stories of the Panchatantra. Beautifully it explores the nuances of this ancient text, and translates its movement in such contemporary idioms that the *Bagh* is almost reconstructed and restructured as someone next door.

The creative clash of multiple identities in Kedar gives him the eternal force of a terse, rooted poet who explicitly commits: "I have often suffered a queer creative tension between the city-centred modern creativity and the rural racial consciousness. This tension is a well-known fact of our everyday life but it rarely draws our critical attention. For me this experience constitutes an aesthetic perception and on a deeper level, it forms an indispensable part of my moral consciousness too. My crea-



*Prof. Gangadhar Gadgil garlanding him,
Sahitya Akademi Award function, 1989*



At the Red Square, Moscow with the Indian delegation of writers in 1987

tivity tries its level best to assimilate the interaction of these two areas of experience. How far I am successful in this venture is difficult for me to assess but this does constitute an important part of my creativity, and I just don't want to forget it."

Kedar's poems have widely been translated into Spanish,

English, Russian, German and almost all the major Indian languages. Kedar himself being a translator has widely translated Polish, English and French poets of his choice.

Kedar is a perceptive critic of poetry too. He has written some astounding pieces of what Eliot refers to as 'workshop criticism'. In all his criti-



With Trilochan and Shamsher in Delhi, 1977



With fellow writers and artists - Malayaj, Swaminathan, Namawar Singh, Nemichand Jain and Nirmal Verma, 1979

cal works Kedar translates western influence into rootedly Indian idioms. As a critic of poetry he has developed a unique critical idiom of his own which lays special emphasis on the linguistic tools in terms of imagery, diction, etc. His dissertation on imagery and poetic language, his thesis on

imagination and his critical commentary on fellow poets, both Indian and Western, are full of insights, and as determinants of the creative process, they raise important issues of poetic theory.

At present he is working as a Professor of Hindi in Jawaharlal Nehru University.

A Select Bibliography

Poetry

Abhi Bilkul Abhi. Allahabad: Naya Sahitya Prakashan, 1960

Zameen Pak Rahi Hai. Delhi: Prakashan Sansthan, 1980

Yahan Se Dekho. Delhi: Radhakrishnan Prakashan, 1983

Pratinidhi Kavitayen. Delhi, Rajkamal Prakashan, 1985

Akal Mein Saras. Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1988

Uttar Kabir aur Anya Kavitanyen. Delhi, Rajkamal Prakashan, 1995

Bagh (a long poem). Delhi, Bharatiya Jnanpith (in press)

Criticism

Kalpna aur Chhayavad Allahabad: Hans Prakashan, 1957

Adhunik Hindi Kavitan mein Bimvidhan. Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1971

Mere Samaya Ke Shabd. Delhi: Radhakrishnan Prakashan, 1993

Edited Books

Kavita Dashak. Delhi: Hindi Academy, 1993

Tanee Hui Pratyancha (An Anthology of Twentieth Century Russian Poetry). Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994.

A Chronology

- 1934 Birth
- 1944 Sent to Benaras for schooling
- 1950 First poem published in *Samaj* of Benaras
- 1956 M.A. in Hindi Literature
Joined U.P. College, Benaras as a lecturer
- 1957 First book of criticism published
- 1960 First collection of poems published
Joined St. Andrews College, Gorakhpur as a lecturer.
- 1962 Joined U.N. College, Padrama (Deoria, U.P.) as Head of the Hindi Department
- 1964 Received Ph.D. degree
- 1976 Joined Jawaharlal Nehru University as Reader
- 1977 Wife passed away
- 1980 *Zameen Pak Rahi Hai* published.
Received Kumaran Asan Award
- 1983 Appointed Director of Nirala Srijanpeeth, Bhopal
- 1986 Visited USA
- 1987 Visited USSR
- 1989 Received Sahitya Akademi Award
- 1990 Nirala Puraskar from Hindi Sansthan, Uttar Pradesh
Received Hindi Academy Award
- 1992 Received Jeevan Bharati Samman from Orissa
- 1992 Founded *Saakhi*, a literary journal
- 1994 Received Maithilisharan Gupt Samman
- 1995 Visited Kazakhstan



Receiving Hindi Academy Award from the Lt. Governor in Delhi, 1990