



Sahitya Akademi

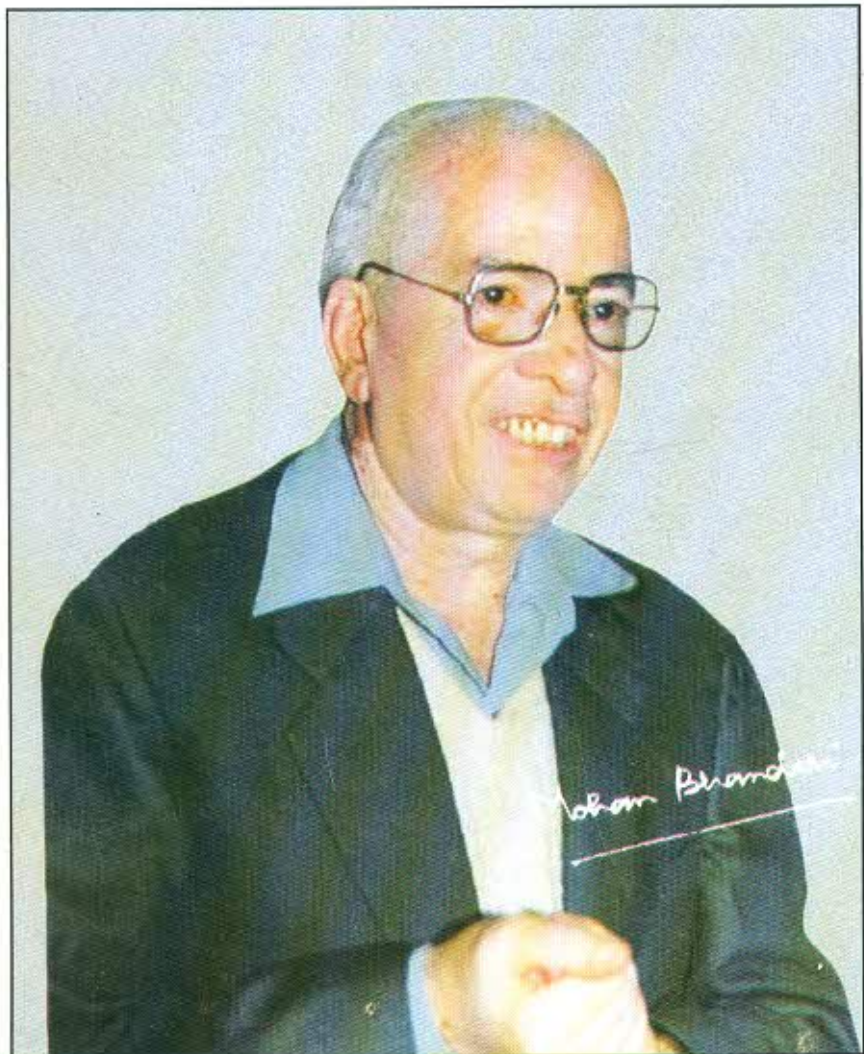


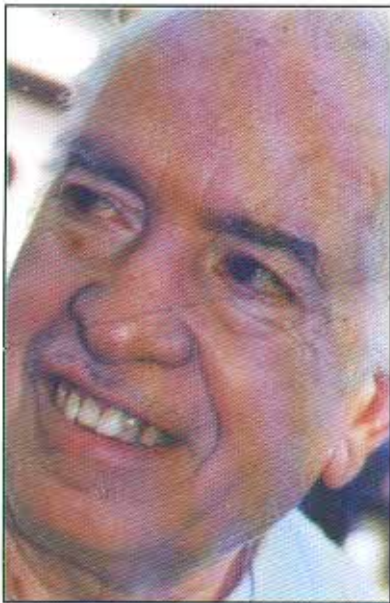
India International Centre

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## meet the author

**Mohan Bhandari**





*The writer is not a reformer. At best, he can force a reader to don the thinking cap....I look upon myself as an ever vigilant student of human nature, which seems boundless to me....If at all there is another life, I hope to be born once again as a writer....*

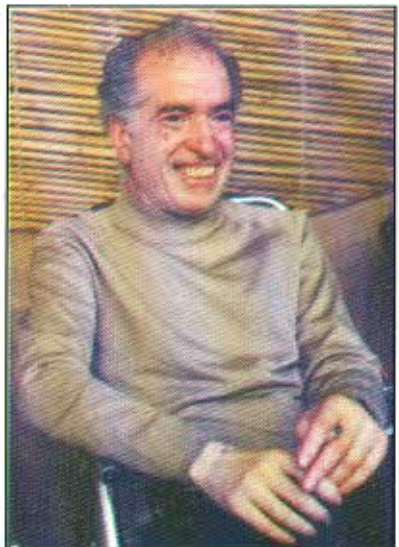
*Mohan Bhandari*

Mohan Bhandari was born into a family of small-time shopkeepers to illiterate parents on February 14, 1937 in Banbhaura village of Sangrur district. Before his birth, his father had owned some land and a shop in the village, all of which he either gambled away or lost to his incorrigible opium addiction. Strained circumstances drove his father into becoming a sort of travelling salesman who used to go around his village and even the neighbouring villages, his children in tow, selling odds and ends. However, his father ensured that at least his sons received a reasonably decent education. While Mohan's primary education was from the local village school, he was sent to the Government High School, Amargarh for middle-level education. Though his teachers

never inflicted any corporeal punishment on him, seeing them beating hapless, young students always tugged at his heartstrings.

Growing up in the labyrinthine, grubby streets of his village, Bhandari was first awakened to the richness of the rural landscape and the profusion of its natural beauty. This is where he first partook of the rich and varied tradition of Punjabi folklore and culture, too. Whatever he had lost by way of a strong inheritance of literary culture, he more than made up by imbibing all he could from this ambience and social environment. It was here that the first stirrings of his creativity became discernible and the seeds of his later creativity were sowed. Inspired by a real-life incident about a young girl whose beauty had captivated him, he wrote his first story "Adhwata" while still in Class IX. There was no looking back ever since, though poems and stories always came to him in small measures.

An extremely sensitive and perceptive child, Mohan was scarred for life by the sudden demise of his father. Recalling the details of his personal tragedy, he says, "The night I lost my father, I was shaken from deep within. Huddled in a cor-

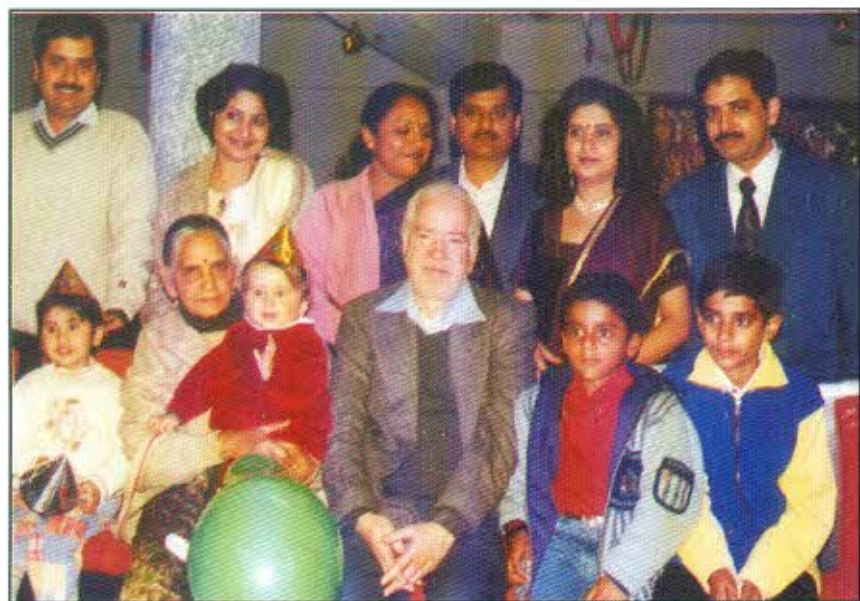


ner, I sat up during the whole the night, listening to the heart-rending wails and cries. That night, the lantern and I had burnt away silently." Later, Partition and the Punjab tragedy were also to leave equally indelible traces upon his soul. All of this turned into the material, in fact the core, of his writing later.

His father's death had left him with no choice but to start peddling wares as a part-time vocation. This enabled him to sustain the family and also to fund his own education. After doing his matriculation at

— a city that has been a home to him and several other Punjabi writers, too, for over four decades now. Though basically shy and modest, he always loves being surrounded by his literary friends, so much so that his rented house in Sector 20, where he lived close to twenty years, was referred to as the 'Dera of Baba Mohan Bhandari.' While struggling to set himself up in an upcoming city, he first completed his graduation, then took a law degree from Panjab University, and his M. A. (Punjabi).

His debut collection *Til*



Family picture with wife and three sons, daughters-in-law & grandchildren

Malerkotla, he proceeded to Nabha to join Ripudaman College with the intention of completing his F.Sc., which he somehow couldn't. In an otherwise bright academic life, this was the first failure he tasted. Abandoning all his ambitious future plans, he picked up the first job that came his way. This is how he had ended up as a clerk in the Education Department of the Punjab Government at Shimla way back in 1958.

The next year, he moved to Chandigarh, a fledgling city then

*Chauli* (1965) won him instant recognition by way of Chandigarh Sahitya Akademi Award. Encouraged by early critical acclaim, he published his second collection *Manukh Di Per* soon after in 1967. Thereafter, he slowed down considerably, trying hard to juggle around the pressures of his job with the growing demands of domesticity and the nagging, disquieting desire for self-expression. His third collection *Kaath Di Lat* was in the making for as many as eight years, which was finally

published in 1975. *Pacchan*, the fourth one, took another twelve years to come out. A self-professed miniaturist, he writes somewhat studiously, even punctiliously. Sometimes he spends as many as three months working on a story, and some stories undergo no less than seven revisions. No wonder, his stories often exude a quiet confidence, an unerring control and finesse.

He says, "For me, the creative process is something of a hide and seek game. The story is a naughty little girl, teasing and pulling away, cutting corners, hiding in nooks and crannies. It's never easy to trip her up. So many times she dodges and slips away, right under your nose. But when she is suddenly caught, the joy is simply inexpressible." In the early 90s, liberated from humdrum worries, his creative urge went into a sudden upswing. In less than a decade, he brought out three collections of stories viz., *Moon Di Akh* (1993, 2000), *Baraf Latare Rukh* (1994) and *Tan Pattan* (1998, 2000). Apart from the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection *Moon Di Akh* in 1998, among others, he has received Kulwant Singh Virk Sahit Puraskaar (2000) and K. S. Dhaliwal Award (2002) for his invaluable contribution to Punjabi letters.

Memories of his rural past often mingle with the crackling sounds of the cityscape he inhabits to form a rich, varied texture for his stories. It was the pulsating, seething discontent in the sedate lives of the babus, peons and other such characters that caught his fancy. Peeling off the layers of indifference and anonymity, Bhandari portrays them sympathetically, revitalising and humanising them in the process.

One of his widely acclaimed stories, *Tirkia Hoya Sheesha*, offers a rare insight into the rigmarole of official callousness and apathy that ultimately provokes even a seemingly obsequious and servile clerk into rebellion. In another story *Kukad Da Phang*, Hira Lal Chaprasi, a peon, on being dubbed 'Kukad Da Phang' struggles hard with the loss of both his name and identity, while his colleagues and superiors debate whether the actual word is 'phang' or 'khamb.' *Mainoo Tagore Bana De Maa* is something of a minor classic that recounts how a poor village lad's dream of becoming a poet is thwarted by his personal circumstances, and how he ends up as a donkey-herd instead.

Though often preoccupied with the sordid, even seamy aspects of life, Bhandari stubbornly refuses to sink into despair. An inveterate optimist, time and again he re-affirms faith in the cardinal principle that change is the only eternal law of nature. No wonder, he is often able to glimpse hope where none seems to exist for others. □



Author with Balraj Sahni

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*Tan Pattan (Selected Short Stories)*. Ludhiana: Chetna Prakashan (1998, 2002)

*Katha Varta (Collected Works)*. Ludhiana: Chetna Prakashan (2000)

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*Peetal Ke Bartan*. Chandigarh: Abhishek Publications (1993)

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*Sare Pagal*. Four Essays on madness collected from different sources in English translated into Punjabi. Chandigarh: Lokgeet Prakashan (1981)

*Subramania Bharati*. Biography in English by Prema Nandakumar, translated into Punjabi. New Delhi: National Book Trust (1986)

### Work available on

#### Mohan Bhandari's writings

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*Mohan Bhandari Di Kahani Kala* by Gurwinder Kaur (1985)

*Place of Mohan Bhandari in Punjabi Short Story after 1960* by Inderjeet Kaur (1991-92)

*Mohan Bhandari Da Kahani Sangreh 'Moon Di Akh' - Ik Adhayan* by Racchpal Singh (1995-96)

*Mohan Bhandari — Shabad Samvedna* by Sarabjit Singh  
Besides, several scholarly articles on various aspects of Bhandari's *Kahani Kala* have appeared in different magazines and journals.



Author with friends, Gurdial Singh, Dr. Kesar Singh Kesar



With a group of writers at Chandigarh. Some of them are:  
 Sitting: Gurbax Singh Preetlari, Dr. M.S. Randhawa, Khushwant Singh,  
 Standing : V.N. Tiwari, Shiv Batalvi, Mohan Bhandari (IIIrd from right)

## A Chronology

1937	Born in Banbhaura village of Sangrur district	1965	Wins Chandigarh Sahitya Akademi Award for his debut collection <i>Til Chauli</i>
1944-51	Primary education from the local village school	1966	Law degree from Panjab University
1948	Sudden demise of his father brings family burden on him	1967	Second collection <i>Manukh Di Per</i> published.
1952	Admitted to Government School, Amargarh	1973	Completes M. A. (Punjabi)
1953	Writes his first story "Adhwata" while still in Class IX	1975	<i>Kaath Di Lat</i> on which he worked for eight years, published.
1954	Passes matriculation at Malerkotla	1987	<i>Pacchan</i> , the fourth collection, comes out after twelve years.
	Proceeds to Nabha to join Ripudaman College for doing F. Sc.	1993	<i>Moon Di Akh</i> published
1958	Takes up the job of a clerk in the Education Department of the Punjab Government at Shimla	1994	<i>Baraf Latare Rukh</i> comes out
		1998	<i>Tan Pattan</i> published.
1959	Moves to Chandigarh	1998	Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection <i>Moon Di Akh</i>
1961	Completes his graduation	2000	Kulwant Singh Virk Sahit Puraskaar
		2002	K.S. Dhaliwal Award.