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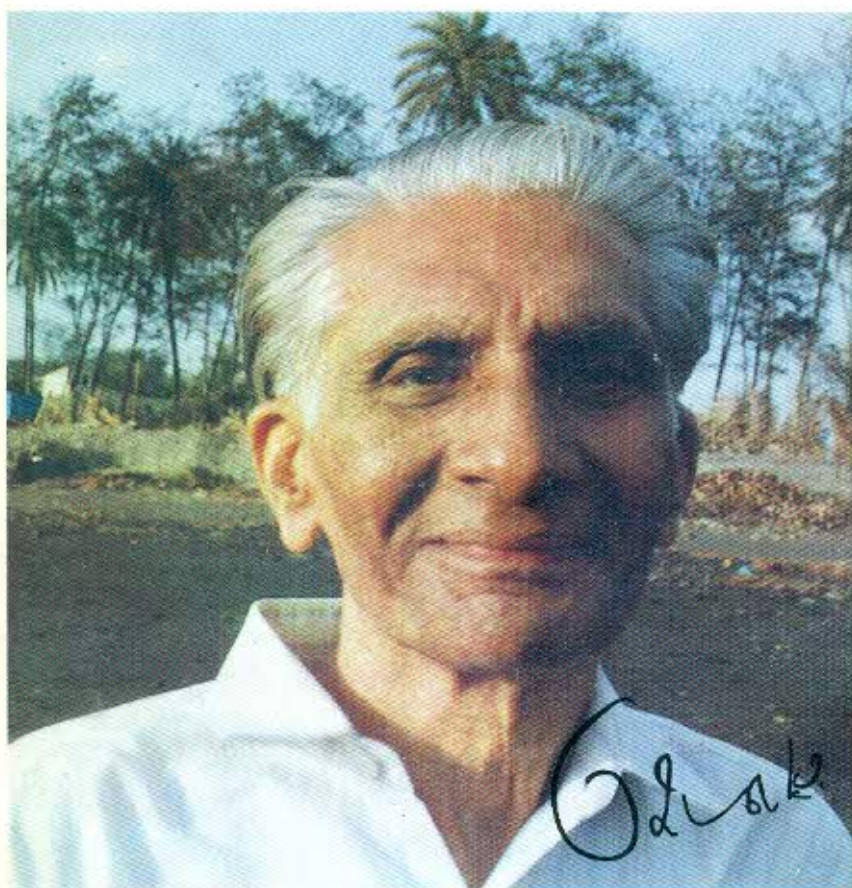
Narmad Sahitya Sabha

invite you to

**meet the author**

Natvarlal Kuberdas Pandya

**"USHANAS"**





**N**atvarlal Kuberdas Pandya, better known in the Literary world by his pen name Ushanas started the creative activity even as he was a high school student. By the time he graduated, his name was pretty well-known as a poet of promise. However, it was only after 1955 when he published his first poetry collection entitled *Prasoon* that attracted the attention of a wider reading public and critics. Though the naming of the first collection reflected the modesty and humility on the part of the poet, critics and perceptive connoisseurs alike were quick to hail him as a front rank poet and predicted that the budding poet (*Prasun* [sk] means a flower bud) would soon blossom into a beautiful flower to embellish the garden of Gujarati poetry.

The naming of the first collection by Ushanas also brought almost all the salient characteristics as well as limitations of the poet, namely his penchant for highly Sanskritised diction, his preference for the Shakespearean sonnet form, his attraction for nature in its infinite moods, his family poems, his keen sense of yearning in love poetry, his patriotic fervour, his strong philosophical bent of mind which often mars his lyrics, his exuberance which is seen as his limitation and the ruggedness of diction combining with his highly Sanskritised vocabulary. Though in his later poetry, Ushanas claims to

have embraced the modern spirit in the content and technique of his poetry, his preference and predilection for the classic in style, metrical compositions and diction have persisted in his poetry in one way or the other.

The launching of his first collection in 1955 almost coincided with a major movement in Gujarati literature which was spearheaded by Suresh Joshi and which exposed both creative writers and the readers to modernist trends which had emerged in post-war European literature. Suresh Joshi found a strong following and became instrumental in changing the course of Gujarati creative writing in terms of thematic thrust and technique. He vigorously propounded the new poetics in his numerous writings.

Ushanas, however, had very strong moorings in the classical Gujarati poetry founded by stalwarts like Balvantrai Thakore and Manishankar Ratnaji Bhatt "Kant", and the romantic fervour of poets like Umashankar Joshi, Sundaram, Prahlad Parekh, Harishchandra Bhatt etc. In addition, he is well grounded in the classical Sanskrit Poetry the salient features of which are constantly reflected in his poetic compositions. And that is not all. Ushanas had come under the influence of the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore in his formative years. Besides all this, he had imbibed the spirit of the Gandhian era. These varied influences lend his poetry a peculiar character all its own.

If we analyse this peculiar character of his poetry, we find that at a time when the modern spirit was overtaking Gujarati Poetry, the poetry of Ushanas remained firmly grounded in tradition. There is a fine blending of the classical and the romantic in most of his poetry.

Ever since poet Nanalal Dalpatram Kavi broke new grounds in metrical

composition when he introduced his now famous Apadyagadya or Dolanshalli, Gujarati poetry had tended to break free from the metres. But Nanalal's experiment remained confined to himself. It was not until Niranjan Bhagat and more markedly Suresh Joshi broke new grounds by composing in free verse forms the new poetry that the trend made its impact. However, unfazed by the tidal wave of the modernist movement, Ushanas, propelled by his classical convictions, continued writing in the traditional metres.

Basically Ushanas's poetry is an expression of complex human emotions, such as an infinite sense of wonder at creation, of love and its myriad manifestations, of nature in its infinite variety, seasonal moods and mystery.

Among the numerous themes that he turns to again and again, the one that persists throughout is his love of nature. His poetry abounds in delicately drawn pictures of nature with all her richness and charm. Added to it is a mystic mood which makes even his songs – and Ushanas has a great fascination for this form of expression – somewhat philosophical which is why they are not as playful as songs are supposed to be.

However, in his nature poetry, Ushanas is at his best. There is in it a primeval power which makes his poems gushing with force and

fervour. In majority of his poems collected in 'Manomudra', 'Trun no Grah', 'Roop na Lay', and 'Ardra' his abiding love of nature is beautifully expressed. In his more sober moods however, his nature poetry, especially his description of the seasons have the sombre dignity found in Valmiki's Ramayana. He has repeatedly stated that wonder is the inspiring force of much of his nature poetry. The primitiveness of his boundless, attraction for nature makes him the poet of leaves of grass. For the grass blade gives him the image of the life force. Initially grass growing in the chinks of his rural house inspired awe and fear, but eventually as he matures he learns to look upon the grass blade as a symbol of life. It therefore becomes a persistent metaphor in his poetry. One of his collections is called *Trun no Grah* (1964) (The Planet of Grass).

The second important theme of his poetry is family and human relations. Two poems in his very first collection "Prasun" have become immortal. The first "Valavi Ba Avi" is about a mother returning home after seeing her children & their families off, after holidays. The house wears such a deserted look and the sense of being alone so overpowers the mother that she lets herself fall at the doorsteps.

It is interesting to note that nearly half the number of poems in this



With Sri Sundaram



Receiving Sahitya Akademi Award 1976

first collection are songs and the other half metrical compositions. The subjects which he handles in this collection also epitomise his life-long concerns and later we find whole collections presenting one of those concerns, for example "Shishulok", "Bharat Darshan" "Prithvine Pashim Chehre" "Vyakul Vaishnav", and "Marl Prithvi Marun Aakash".

As stated earlier, Ushanas has a penchant for the traditional forms of poetic composition. His mastery over metres is a rare achievement. The two metres which he prefers most and excels in are Shikharini and Prithvi. In one his model is Kant and in the other, Balvantraj Thakore. How strong his preference for Shikharini is and with what deftness and facility he composes in that metre can be seen in innumerable poems from one of his earliest and celebrated poem "Valavi Ba Avi". Yet his "Prithvi Gatino Chhandolay" could easily have been entitled Shikharini. For in that collection of 26 sonnets, except two (one in Prithvi and one in Vasant Tilaka) the rest are in Shikharini. A whole cluster of 15 sonnets is presented in that metre. In the Bharat darshan cluster of 32 sonnets, 18 are in Prithvi. These are samples to illustrate certain preferences of Ushanas.

It is said of Wordsworth that he

loved nature most and next to nature man. One can say the same of Ushanas also. As has been stated earlier, he is primarily a poet of nature and man. And when we speak of man as the subject of his poetry, we cannot separate it from human relations. His poems of family life have a lasting place in Gujarati Poetry. His elegiac sonnet clusters on the death of his father and mother is a rare poetic achievement. "Prithvine Paschim Chehre" also makes this amply clear. The same can be said about his poems of motherhood which find finest expression in "Shishulok".

As for his love poems, Ushanas is a poet of yearning. His love poems have a yearning sadness about them. They are not the poems of love attained but love unrequited. To him that seems to be his destiny in love.

Mention was made above of his sonnet clusters. This brings out another characteristic of Ushanas namely his prolificity. He overflows with thought and emotion and therefore very often he has to continue a single subject into several compositions. In other forms of poetry, say his songs, also his imagination runs on exuberantly from one poem to another. There are but few poets in Gujarati who can be classed with Ushanas in this.

Ushanas, following in the footsteps



Addressing a meeting

of Umashankar Joshi has given two collections of dramatic verse which may more appropriately be called versified dialogues, for they lack the genuine dramatic quality. Verse drama has been an unfulfilled quest with Gujarati poets. Kant invented Khand Kavya, a peculiar form resembling the one-act play more than a full length poetic play such as the Elizabethan English poets wrote. After Kant, Umashankar wanted to carry on that tradition, but was less successful than Kant as his poems in *"Prachina"* and *"Mahaprasthan"* illustrate. There the dramatic quality remains confined to dialogues in verse between characters taken from our epics and mythology. Ushanas in his *"Nepathye"* and *"Aroh-Avaroh"* has done the same as Umashankar Joshi and perhaps with less success than his predecessor. In Ushanas the utterances of the characters are more like monologues than dialogues.

His devotional bent of mind has found full expression in *"Vyakul Vaishnav"*. It is a collection of 71 devotional poems. In the true Vaishnavite tradition they are songs where the poet is seen as an eager yearning devotee and lover. Though unlike Vaishnavite devotional songs the name of Krishna, Radha or Gopi do not figure in these poems, these songs have the same yearning the same craving, eagerness and desire as that of Radha's as for the emotional content is concerned.

His collection of poems entitled *"Shishulok"* is a strange mix of mature responses like those of a father, mother and grandfather to the birth, growth and activities of children as well as songs for children which are fewer in number. It may be said at the cost of repetition that Ushanas is more at home with the meditative mood rather than the playful and gay abandon

expressing the sheer joy or being and seeing the endless wonders of creation.

Besides his poetry, his autobiographical book *"Sadmatano Khancho"* is a unique personal account presented with high poetic sensibility. It is not a factual statement of what Ushanas is and what he did, but there is a poetic quality about its descriptions. Combined with its narrative quality, it is rightly described by the author as something of an autobiographical novel.

As a critic his contribution is incidental and is the result of his being a teacher of Gujarati literature. *"Be Adhyayano"* (1952), *"Roop ane Ras"* (1965), *"Upasarg"* (1973) and *"Mulankano"* are his noted collections of critical writings.

The worth of his creative output has been duly recognised both at the regional and national levels as can be seen from the coveted literary laurels he has won from time to time. More noteworthy among them are Kumar Chandrak (1971) and Narmad Chandrak for *"Trun no Grah"* (1972), Ranjitram Chandrak in 1976 and Sahitya Akademi Award for his *"Ashwaththa"* (1976). From 1991 to 1993 he adorned the august office of the President of Gujarati Sahitya Parishad.

In the ultimate evaluation, Ushanas will be remembered primarily as a poet pure and simple, who has enriched Gujarati poetry with his fifteen collections.



*Yashwant Shukla felicitating*

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## A Chronology

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|---------|--|---------|---|
| 1920    | September 28, at Savli, Dist. Vadodara   | 1948    | Kovid in Hindi, Wardha, Ist class                   |
| 1942    | B.A. (Hons). Baroda College, Vadodara. Bombay University with Sanskrit Principal (Hons). | 1947-57 | Lecturer in Gujarati at S.B. Garda College, Navsari |
| 1942-43 | Participated in 'Quit India' movement  | 1957-69 | Prof. of Gujarati, at Arts College, Valsad          |
| 1945    | M.A. University of Bombay with Gujarati Principle  | 1969-80 | Principal of Arts College, Valsad                   |