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Sahitya Akademi



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invite you to

meet the author

Ashok Vajpeyi



The salt of poetry lies in your life, your experiences, in your faith in language, in your expectation from words, your subtlety and refinement of skill. Also in your growing or declining relations with others... Poetry grows only if the apprehension and the recognition take place simultaneously.

Ashok Vajpeyi

A well-known Hindi poet, critic, editor, cultural activist and cultural administrator, Sri Ashok Vajpeyi was born in a lower middle-class family at Rajnandgaon in Madhya Pradesh in 1941. Having received his education at the University of Sagar and at St. Stephen's College, Delhi, he had a brief stint as a lecturer and then he joined Indian Administrative Service in 1965. A very able, adept and creative civil servant, he served in the Government of India for more than thirty years in various capacities specialising in culture and arts. Ashok Vajpeyi's journey as the writer began when he was in school. He has come a long way since then having authored nearly three dozen books including ten

collection of poems and ten books of literary criticism in Hindi. He loves to be identified primarily as a writer and writing – especially poetry is his chief claim to fame.

There are five major themes in Ashok Vajpeyi's poetry: love, death, nature, absence and presence. He was born and brought up in a small town mostly deprived of the blessings of nature. But somehow he developed intense empathy with nature which he learnt to observe minutely. It helped him a great deal in finding images and metaphors for his poetry. Images come to him irresistibly. But a string of images is not a poem according to him. It is more than its images. "You need silences, rhythm, resonance, etc. to weave a poem".



With Prof. Vidya Niwas Misra, Smt. Krishna Sobti,
Prof. Namwar Singh at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal. 1995

To him at one level poetry is celebration. He has tremendous faith in the creative world. To him words are a reliable hold on reality. Their sounds, their intonations and resonance, their archaicness, and their just being there excite and inspire him. Unlike the painter who wishes to paint in a particular colour, a poet cannot write just to use a word. Then there are times when the intensity or the disturbance caused by a presence or an absence provokes poetry. Sri Ashok Vajpeyi published his first collection of poems *Shahar Ub Bhi Sambhavana Hai* (1966), at the age of 25. It reflects not only the painful self-consciousness of adolescence struggling to come to terms with a crude and hostile adult world, but also its assurance of certainties which were the natural possession of a deeply affirmative and even cerebral capability. Says Ramesh Chandra Shah, "The inevitable intrusion of self-alienating urban imagery is counterbalanced by the elemental imagery of small-town landscape, family ties and erotic discoveries of the self and the other."

Ek Patang Anant Mein (1984) his next collection of poems was published after a gap of nearly 15 years which was followed by *Agar Itne Se* (1986) and *Tatpurush* (1989), *Kahin Nahin Vahin* (1991), his Sahitya Akademi Award-winning poetry collection, represents his preoccupation with eternal themes like nature, love, and death, his unique treatment of body and home and his metaphorical concern for language.

Bahuri Akela (1992), is a dirge on the death of the famous classical singer, Kumar Gandharva. Here, a poet who



With his wife Rashmi. 1990

is a fount of words writes on a musician whose avocation transcended words. In celebrating this timeless absence, the poet celebrates life twinkling in the embers of a funeral pyre.

According to Ashok Vajpeyi, a poet perceives and understands life through poetry alone. The concept of neighbourhood became the essential geography of his poetic universe. In neighbourhood there is a constant twilight of presence and absence. "Poetry", according to Ashok Vajpeyi, "on the one hand, is living in language and, on the other, it is the memory of language. If there is no resonance, a construct of language cannot attain the status of poetry. Rhythm is a version of this resonance. Poetry is written not merely out of one's life experiences, it is also written by learning from others' poetic experiences."

Avignon, brought out in 1995 is a collection of his poems and prose written while he was in Avignon in France. In the poems of this collection the interaction between the past and the present is unique where the poet sees his hidden memory space in the middle of the monastery. The poems in *Abhi Kuchh Aur* (1998) were written

between 1995 and 1996. *Samaya Ke Paas Samaya*, his next collection of poems, was brought out in 2000. *Ibarat Se Giri Matrayen* (2002) is his latest collection of poems.

Ashok Vajpeyi has been an insightful critic of art and literature as proved by his works *Philhal* (1970), *Kuch Poorvagraha* (1986) and the rest of the eight works of literary and art criticism including *Kabhi-Kabhar* 2000, a collection of his weekly column in *Jansatta* on literature, language, arts, ideas, poetics, etc. and *Kavi Kah Gaya Hai* (2000) a collection of essays on poetry, and his latest work *Raza* (2002), a book of art on S.H. Raza, with an introduction, an interview and a poem.

Recognition and projection of contemporary creative talent has been yet another important aspect of his literary activity. The magazines he founded or edited like *Samvet*, *Pehchan*, *Poorvagraha*, *Kavita Asia*, *Samasa*, *Indian Horizon*, *Sakshtkar* etc. have been instrumental in bringing out contemporary creative talents and critical writings. He is also founder editor of *Bahuwachan*, a quarterly Hindi journal devoted to literature, language, arts and ideas and *Hindi: Language and*



With his grandson Ribhu. 1999

Discourse Writing, a quarterly international journal in English, both brought out by Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University, New Delhi, where he is presently the Vice-Chancellor.

According to Krishna Sobti, Ashok Vajpeyi's literary presence in the centre of literary arts and litterateurs is full of uncommon energy. The well-known Malayalam poet and critic, K. Satchidanandan, who reads his works closely says that he is not a poet who roars from public platforms but one who speaks in whispers, thus resisting the public, the strident



Receiving Sahitya Akademi Award from Prof. U.R. Anantha Murthy, then President of the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. 1995

and the loud through a solitary encounter with one's most secret being.

Sri Ashok Vajpeyi has been honoured with the prestigious national awards for poetry like the Sahitya Akademi award, the Dayavati Modi Kavi Shekhar Samman and Agyeya Rashtriya Samman for his contribution to Hindi literature. His poems have been widely translated into many Indian and foreign languages including English, German, Polish, French, Arabic, Chinese and Swedish, etc. Book-length translations have also been published in Marathi, Urdu, English and Polish.

Besides being the founder of many prestigious institutions like Bharat Bhavan, a reputed multi-arts complex in Bhopal, and organiser of several cultural festivals in India, Sri Vajpeyi has participated in many international seminars and festivals in New York, Washington, Tokyo, Dhaka, Paris, Avignon, Cambridge, Lima, Madeleine, Jerash, Kathmandu, etc.

He remains to this day productively alive to the different genres of creative and critical writing. There are few writers in Hindi with such a multi-dimensional and evergreen creativity.

A Select Bibliography

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With Polish poet Tadeusz Rozewicz, Krakow, 2001

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Kavi Kah Gaya Hai. New Delhi: Bhartiya Jnanpeeth, 2000

Chuni Hui Rachanayein. New Delhi : Vani Prakashan, 2001

Raza. (A book of art) Paris : Ravi Kumar, 2002

A Chronology

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|------|---|------|--|
| 1941 | Birth | 1990 | Edited <i>Kavita Asia</i> , journal in English |
| 1962 | Took his M.A. in English from St. Stephen's College, Delhi | 1994 | Received Dayawati Modi Kavi Shekhar Samman |
| 1965 | Joined Indian Administrative Service | | Received Sahitya Akademi Award |
| 1966 | His first poetry collection <i>Shahar Ub Bhi Sambhavana Hai</i> , published | | Founded and edited <i>Poorvagraha</i> , literary journal |
| 1970 | His first work on literary criticism <i>Philhal</i> , published | 1997 | Participated in Nobel Prize Award ceremony, Stockholm. |
| 1973 | His first cultural assignment as Secretary, Madhya Pradesh Kala Parishad | | Received Rashtriya Samman |
| 1980 | Instituted Kalidas Samman | | Retired as Joint-Secretary, Culture, Govt. of India. |
| 1982 | Participated in UNESCO Seminar on Asian writers, Tokyo | | Appointed as Vice-Chancellor, Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University, Delhi |
| 1987 | Instituted Kabir Samman | | |



With Sri Shamsher Bahadur Singh, Sri Ali Sardar Jafri and Sri Dilip Chitre, New Dehi. 1985