Classic Poetry Series

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

- poems -

Publication Date:

2012

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

Harivansh Rai Bachchan (27 November 1907 – 18 January 2003)

Harivansh Rai Shrivastav alias Bachchan (Hindi: □□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□, Bengali: □□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□) was a noted Indian poet of Chhayavaad literary movement (romantic upsurge) of early 20th century Hindi literature. He was also a famous poet of the Hindi Kavi Sammelan. He is best known for his early work Madhushala (□□□□□□□). He is also the father of Bollywood megastar, Amitabh Bachchan.

Personal Life and Education

Born in a Srivastava Kayastha family, in the village of Babupatti (Raniganj) in the district of Pratapgarh, U.P. near Allahabad in the United Provinces (modern Uttar Pradesh) he was the eldest son of Pratap Narayan Shrivastav and Saraswati Devi. He was called bachchan (meaning Kid at home). He received his formal schooling in a municipal school and followed the family tradition of attending Kayastha Paathshaalas (□□□□□□ □□□□□□□) to learn Urdu as the first step to a career in law. He later studied at the Allahabad University and Banaras Hindu University. In this period, he came under the influence of the independence movement, then under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

Realizing that this was not the path he wanted to follow, he went back to the university. However from 1941 to 1952 he taught in the English Department at the Allahabad University and after that he spent the next two years at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, Cambridge University doing his doctoral thesis on W.B. Yeats. It was then, that he used ‘Bachchan’ as his last name instead of Srivastava. Harivanshrai’s thesis got him his PhD at Cambridge. He is the second Indian to get his doctorate in English literature from Cambridge. After returning to India he again took to teaching and also served at All India Radio, Allahabad.

In 1926, at the age of 19, Bachchan married his first wife, Shyama, who was then 14 years old. However she died ten years later in 1936 after a long spell of TB at just 24 years of age. Bachchan again married, Teji Bachchan, in 1941. They had two sons, Amitabh and Ajitabh.

In 1955, Harivanshrai shifted to Delhi to join the External Affairs Ministry as an officer on Special duty and during the period of 10 years that he served he was also associated with the evolution of Hindi as the official language. He also enriched Hindi through his translations of major writings. As a poet he is famous for his poem Madhushala (a bar selling alcoholic drinks). Besides Omar Khayyam’s Rubaiyat, he will also be remembered for his Hindi translations of Shakespeare’s Macbeth and Othello and also the Bhagvad Gita. However in Nov 1984 he wrote his last poem ‘Ek November1984’ on

Indira Gandhi’s assassination.

Harivanshrai was nominated to the Indian Rajya Sabha in 1966 and received the Sahitya Akademi award three years later. In 1976 he was honoured with the Padma Bhushan for his immense contribution to Hindi literature. He was also honoured with the Saraswati Samman, the Sovietland Nehru Award and the Lotus Award of the Afro-Asian writers’ conference, for his unique contribution to the world of letters. But if ever asked to introduce himself, he had a simple introduction: Mitti ka tan, masti ka man, kshan-bhar jivan — mera parichay. (A body of clay, a mind full of play, a moment’s life - that is me.).

Career

In 1941 Bachchan began teaching English at Allahabad University, some ten years later an opportunity arose to apply for study in England. Although the principal objective was to study English-teaching methodology, Bachchan saw it as an opportunity to complete his previous studies on the Irish poet WB Yeats. His acceptance at Cambridge may well have rested more on his popular acclaim rather than his academic studies, but whilst at Cambridge he excelled, achieving his doctorate in English Literature for his work on Yeats.

Bachchan was a student of the renowned English literature don, Thomas Rice Henn. In June 1954 Henn wrote a reference for Bachchan describing his thesis as a:

"... genuine contribution to our knowledge, [that] will be of great assistance to future students of the work of WB Yeats … [Bachchan] has a tremendous enthusiasm for his subject, and an unusual sensibility to English poetry and its background in religion, philosophy and social history. He also has the outstanding advantage of being a poet in his own right."

Bachchan and Henn built a close relationship during his time at Cambridge and remained in touch on his return to India. Eleven years after leaving the University Bachchan's thesis was published to coincide with the Yeats centenary; Dr Henn wrote the preface.

In his autobiography, Bachchan describes his first impressions of the city:

"Cambridge enchanted me from very first glimpse: the banks of the slowly-flowing Cam, flanked by rows of centuries-old buildings and crossed by bridges of various designs … Even slight knowledge of history would project the faces of Newton, Bacon, Darwin, Spenser, Cromwell and Milton onto the scene—and of Marlowe, Gray, Thackeray, Wordsworth, Byron and Tennyson; and from my own country, Ramanujam, Aurobindo, Iqbal, Subhas Bose and Jawaharlal. I saw Cambridge in both its contemporary and its historical dimension, and if I were to describe my first reactions, I would have to say I was overwhelmed: entranced by its cultivated beauty, humbled by its extraordinary gifts to the world."

Bachchan was awarded his doctorate after two years at Cambridge: the significance of this achievement should not be underestimated. He had left his wife and two children in India whilst he studied; he and his family endured financial hardship and the trials of a long separation, including malicious rumours levelled against him and his family. Achieving his doctorate was vindication of the sacrifices they had made and meant that ‘his honour was saved’. His wife had the news of his success printed in the local papers.

After returning to India, Bachchan taught briefly and then worked as a producer for All India Radio in Allahabad. In 1955, he moved to Delhi to join the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India and was closely involved with the evolution of Hindi as the country's official language.

Bachchan published about 30 volumes of poetry throughout his lifetime and translated several English works into Hindi. He is best known for his early lyric poem Madhushala (The House of Wine) which was inspired by Edward

Fitzgerald's translation The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam; first published in 1935 it brought him instant fame and his recitals were met with wild enthusiasm from the huge audiences he attracted. The poem has been choreographed and performed on stage, and set to music. Madhushala is one of the most enduring works of Hindi literature and has been translated into English and many regional Indian languages.

Honors

Bachchan was nominated to the Rajya Sabha, the Upper House of the Indian Parliament, in 1966 and received many honours for his contribution to Hindi and Asian literature. In 2003, an Indian postage stamp was released in his memory. The enduring popularity and influence of Bachchan was evident at his funeral in January 2003. Thousands of people attended his funeral procession, and tributes were paid by politicians, industrialists and Bollywood stars. His son, Bollywood star Amitabh Bachchan, visited St Catharine's in 2007 and spoke movingly of his father's time at the College.

Death

Bachchan died on January 18, 2003, at the age of 95, as a result of various respiratory ailments. His wife Teji Bachchan died four years later in 2007, at the age of 93.

Trivia

At present, more people may know Bachchan as being father to India’s best-known film actor, Amitabh Bachchan, than know his reputation as a poet.
The creator of the great collection ‘Madhushala ‘ is often thought to be a great admirer of wonder solutions himself. It is wrongly believed that the creator of one of the most famous poems on wine (Madhushala) never drank liquor. In reality, he had never drank liquor till the time he completed Madhushala. He did drink, although sparingly, later in his life, a fact that he admits to in his autobiography.
One of his inspirational poems, “agneepath” was used as the title and the theme for the 1991 blockbuster movie Agneepath (translates: path of fire) featuring his superstar son Amitabh Bachchan as a ruthless mafia don. This movie was a massive success earning Amitabh Bachchan a National Award for his performance. You can see Amitabh narrating the poem through out the movie.
The poem describes the entire gamut of sufferings that the human race had gone through and is going through.

Works:

Poems

Tera Har (□□□□ □□□) (1932)
Madhushala (□□□□□□□□) (1935)
Madhubala (□□□□□□□□) (1936)
Madhukalash (□□□□□□□) (1937)
Nisha Nimantran (□□□□ □□□□□□□□□) (1938)
Ekaant Sangeet (□□□□□ □□□□□) (1939)
Aakul Antar (□□□□ □□□□) (1943)
Satarangini (□□□□□□□□□) (1945)
Halaahal (□□□□□□) (1946)
Bengal ka Kaavya (□□□□□ □□ □□□□□) (1946)
Kaadi ke Phool (□□□□ □□ □□□) (1948)
Soot ki Maala (□□□ □□ □□□□) (1948)
Milan Yamini (□□□□ □□□□□□□) (1950)
Pranay Patrika (□□□□□ □□□□□□□□) (1955)
Dhaar ke idhar udhar (□□□ □□ □□□ □□□) (1957)
Aarti aur Angaare (□□□□ □□ □□□□□□□) (1958)
Buddha aur Naachghar (□□□□□ □□ □□□□□□) (1958)
Tribhangima (□□□□□□□□□□□□) (1961)
Chaar kheme Chaunsath khoonte (□□□ □□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□) (1962)

Do Chattane (□□ □□□□□□□□□) (1965)
Bahut din beete (□□□□ □□□ □□□□) (1967)
Kat-ti pratimaaon ki awaaz (□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□ □□□□□) (1968)
Ubharte pratimaano ke roop (□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□ □□ □□□) (1969)
Jaal sameta (□□□ □□□□□) (1973)
Nirman

Miscellaneous

Bachpan ke saath kshan bhar (□□□□ □□ □□□ □□□□ □□) (1934)
Khaiyyam ki madhushala (□□□□□□ □□ □□□□□□□) (1938)
Sopaan (□□□□□) (1953)
Mcbeth (1957)
Jangeet (□□□□□□) (1958)
Othello (1959)
Omar Khaiyyam ki rubaaiyan (□□□ □□□□□□ □□ □□□□□□□□) (1959)
Kaviyon ke saumya sant: Pant (□□□□□□ □□ □□□□□ □□□: □□□) (1960)
Aaj ke lokpriya Hindi kavi: Sumitranandan Pant (□□ □□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□: □□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□) (1960)
Aadhunik kavi: 7 (□□□□□□ □□□: □) (1961)
Nehru: Raajnaitik jeevanchitra (□□□□□: □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□) (1961)
Naye puraane jharokhe (□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□) (1962)
Abhinav sopaan (□□□□□ □□□□□) (1964)
Chausath roosi kavitaayein (□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□□□) (1964)
W.B. Yeats and Occultism (1968)
Markat dweep ka swar (□□□□ □□□□□ □□ □□□□) (1968)
Naagar geet (□□□□ □□□) (1966)
Bachpan ke lokpriya geet (□□□□ □□ □□□□□□□□ □□□) (1967)
Hamlet (1969)
Bhaasha apni bhaav paraaye (□□□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□□) (1970)
Pant ke sau patra (□□□ □□ □□ □□□□) (1970)
Pravaas ki diary (□□□□□□ □□ □□□□□) (1971)
King Lear (1972)
Tooti Chooti kadiyan (□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□□) (1973)
Meri kavitaayi ki aadhi sadi (□□□□ □□□□□□ □□ □□□ □□□) (1981)
So-ham hans (□□□□ □□□) (1981)
Aathve dashak ki pratinidhi shreshth kavitaayein (□□□□□ □□□ □□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□) (1982)
Meri shreshth kavitaayein (□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□) (1984)
Jo beet gai so Bat gai

Autobiography / Rachanavali

Kya bhooloon kya yaad karoon (□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□) (1969)
Need ka nirmaan fir (□□□□ □□ □□□□□□□ □□□) (1970)
Basere se door (□□□□□ □□ □□□) (1977)
Dashdwaar se sopaan tak (□□□□□□□ □□ □□□□□ □□) (1985), In the Afternoon of Time
Bachchan rachanavali ke nau khand (□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□ □□ □□□□) (1983)

Andhere Kaa Deepak

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Din Jaldi - Jaldi Dhalta Hai!

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Hai Andheri Raat Par Diva Jalana Kab Mana Hai

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Is Par Us Par

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Jiban Ki Apadapi Mein

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Jugnoo

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

kabi Ko Bashona

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Kahte Hain Taare Gaate Hain

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Kis Kar Mei Yah Bina Dhar Du

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Ksana Bhar Ko Kyo Pyar Kiya Tha?

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Lo Din Bitaa, Lo Raat Gayi

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Madhubala

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Madhushala

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Mujhe Pukaar Lo

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Path Ki Pahchan

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Prateeksha

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Sathi Sab Kuch Sahna Hoga!

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Tha Tumhein Maine Rulaya!

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Yatra Aur Yatri

Harivansh Rai Bachchan