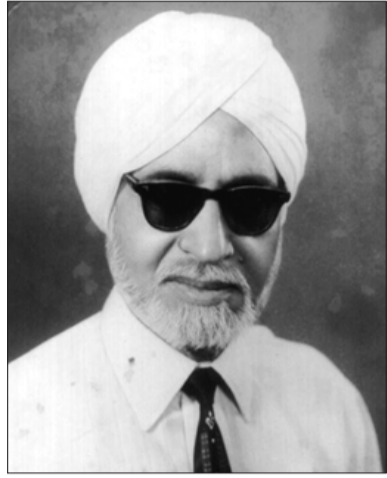


The Story of a Great Punjabi Writer: Avtar Singh Azad and his Literary Legacy



■ PAWAN KUMAR

Punjabi literature has been enriched by the contributions of many eminent writers, poets, and intellectuals who have played a vital role in promoting Punjab's rich cultural heritage. Among these distinguished figures, however, one name stands out for the depth of his vision and the significance of his literary contribution- Avtar Singh Azad. His contribution to Punjabi literature has been remarkable, his literary creations are extensive and thought-provoking, and his lifelong dedication to the Punjabi language remained a defining feature of his life and work.

Avtar Singh Azad was born in December 1904 in his maternal village, Gandiwind, in the Tarn Taran district of Punjab, near the Pakistan border. This village holds historical and religious significance and is closely associated with Guru Arjan Dev Ji. He grew up in challenging circumstances. His family belonged to a farming background. Hardship was a constant companion throughout his childhood. His father, Sardar Nand Singh, joined the army to support the family and spent many years away from home in Mesopotamia and Basra. Tragedy struck early when his mother, Mata Sant Kaur, passed away during the influenza epidemic. Young Avtar Singh grew up with his maternal grandparents, whose influence helped shape his character and worldview. From a young age, signs of his exceptional intelligence were visible. Family elders who met him sensed that he was destined for greatness. Although formal educational opportunities were limited, his thirst for knowledge was extraordinary. He studied in village schools before attending Khalsa Collegiate School Lahore. However, the national freedom movement soon attracted his attention. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's call to the youth

and influenced by the Akali movement, he chose the path of public service and national awakening rather than pursuing higher academic degrees. What he lacked in formal education, he compensated for through self-study and intellectual interest. He acquired a strong command of Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Persian, Sanskrit and English. Such linguistic command enabled him to become one of the most versatile literary personalities of his generation.

His literary journey began at a remarkably young age. The story of Avtar Singh Azad is not merely the story of a writer; it is the story of a man who transformed personal hardships into creative strength. Employment was uncertain, income was irregular, and family responsibilities were enormous. Yet these hardships never deterred him from his commitment to literature and journalism. Known for his courage and independent thinking, he used his pen to raise social awareness and express literary and public concerns. Journalism was not merely a profession for Avtar Singh Azad; it was his passion, mission, and way of life. Over the course of nearly five decades, he served as editor of several prominent Punjabi and Urdu newspapers and magazines, including Babar Sher (1922-23), Kirpan Bhadar (1927-30), Pritam, Fateh, Mauji, Komal Sansaar (1939-40), Bande Mataram (1946-47), Vartmaan (1948-51), Prabhat (1952-69), and Daily Ajit (1969-71). Through his editorials, articles, and literary criticism, he emerged as a fearless journalist and one of the most influential literary voices of his time, earning widespread admiration and respect from readers across Punjab.

His home often became a refuge for political activists and freedom fighters. During the turbulent years surrounding partition, he fearlessly sheltered individuals whose association could have invited danger from colonial authorities. Such acts demonstrated not only his political convictions but also his extraordinary humanity. Honesty remained one of his defining characteristics. During partition, while temporarily living in a house abandoned by a Muslim family, he discovered a hidden cache of money buried on the property. Although he himself faced severe financial difficulties, he ensured that the money was returned to its rightful owner across the newly created border. Such incidents reveal the moral stature of the man far better than any formal tribute could.

Avtar Singh Azad's literary contributions covered a remarkable range of subjects. He was a poet, journalist, historian, author and thinker. His writings reflected social consciousness, patriotism, spirituality, humanism and progressive ideals.



Being honoured by Bhasha Vibhag, Patiala

His deep knowledge of Sikh history and philosophy enriched much of his work. From an early age he immersed himself in Gurbani, Sikh scriptures and classical religious literature. The influence of Sikh thought is clearly visible throughout his writings. Yet Azad's understanding of religion was broader than conventional boundaries. He believed in humanity, compassion and ethical living above ritualism and external appearances. This independent outlook sometimes prevented him from receiving the appreciation he deserved from influential religious and social institutions. Nevertheless, he remained steadfast in his convictions and continued to write fearlessly. Many literary critics have acknowledged the depth of his engagement with Sikh history and Gurbani. His writings helped preserve and interpret important aspects of Sikh heritage for future generations. His contribution to this field remains highly significant, though often overlooked in mainstream discussions of Sikh literature and thought.

Today, when discussions take place regarding the major architects of modern Punjabi literature, the name of Avtar Singh Azad deserves a far more prominent position than it currently occupies. His literary achievements, journalistic excellence and service to Punjabi language place him among the most important intellectual figures of twentieth-century Punjab. Despite recurring disappointments and economic hardship, Azad remained remarkably opti-

mistic. He continued writing when circumstances would have broken the spirit of most people. Personal tragedies also left deep scars. The untimely death of his beloved daughter Kamla profoundly affected him. Yet even in grief, he transformed pain into literature.

During his lifetime, Avtar Singh Azad created an extraordinary body of literary work that reflects the depth of his creativity, and commitment to society. A prolific writer, poet, journalist, translator, editor, and historian, he authored numerous books, poems, epics, biographies, translations, and critical studies. His first book, Kaidi Veer, published in 1922, was so powerful in its nationalist spirit that it was banned. Over the years, he produced acclaimed poetry collections including Sawant Boond, Saawan Peenghan, Vishav Vedna, Noori Jotaan, Jeevan Naad, Kansoan, Saun Sikhraan and Rasdhara, addressing themes of patriotism, humanity, social justice, spirituality, and the sufferings of ordinary people. Azad also made a significant contribution to Sikh literature and history through monumental epics such as Mard Agamaraha on Guru Gobind Singh Ji, Vishav Noor on Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Mahabali on Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and Ratt Ka Kangu, which vividly portrays the sacrifices made by Sikhs during the eighteenth century. His translation of classical masterpieces, including Jaffarnama, Meghdoot, and Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat enriched Punjabi literature by bringing world-renowned works to Punjabi readers. Be-

yond poetry and history, Azad wrote biographies, literary criticism, essays, and autobiographical works. His books such as Punjabi Sahit De Usariyae, Manukhta De Usariyae, and Shahid Bhagat Singh remain valuable contributions to Punjabi prose. In his final years, he began writing his autobiography, Yug Jo Beet Gaya, which was completed after his death by his elder son Avinash Azad. Collectively, his writings constitute a rich literary legacy that continues to inspire readers and scholars alike, securing his place among the most versatile and significant figures in the history of Punjabi literature.

Avtar Singh Azad's life reflects the same determination that characterized his entire journey. Even as diabetes severely affected his health and financial difficulties limited access to medical care, he continued writing. When illness prevented him from attending the office, he wrote from home. His dedication to journalism remained intact until the very end. His last editorial was published one week before his death. By then, his health had deteriorated significantly. Complications arising from diabetes affected multiple organs, and treatment options were limited. Before arrangements could be made for advanced medical care, Avtar Singh Azad passed away on 31st May, 1972. With his death, Punjab lost not merely a poet or journalist but a complete literary institution. A powerful voice fell silent, leaving an irreplaceable void in Punjabi literature. A scholar of Sikh history and culture left behind a treasure of writings that future generations continue to discover. He lived honestly, wrote fearlessly and served literature selflessly.

His family, that lovingly called him 'Pitaji', also inherited his creative legacy. His son, Parkash Singh, emerged as a respected artist and writer, undoubtedly influenced by the intellectual and artistic environment created by his father. The creative tradition continued into the next generation. His daughter-in-law, Harcharan Kaur Ritu, established herself as a theatre artist, contributing to the performing arts. Today, his granddaughter, Purva Singh Azad, settled in the Canada, is spreading the fragrance of his thoughts in a unique and meaningful manner. Recognizing the historical importance of her grandfather's work, Purva is committed to preserving his literary heritage and is making dedicated efforts to republish his valuable writings. Through these efforts, she is helping to preserve an important literary legacy not only for her family but also for Punjabi literature as a whole. With the efforts of Purva Singh Azad, a website dedicated to Avtar Singh Azad was created and designed by his

great-granddaughter, Raviya Azad. One of the greatest ironies of Avtar Singh Azad's life was that, despite his remarkable contributions to Punjabi literature and journalism, he never received the recognition commensurate with his literary achievements. Despite making significant contributions to Punjabi literature and journalism, he remained largely overlooked during his lifetime, and even after his death, the honour and recognition due to him have remained insufficient. Government bodies, literary organizations and state as well as national academies failed to honour him in proportion to his contribution.

A few of his rare and valuable books are available in the Central State Library, Chandigarh, and the Punjab Agricultural University Library, Ludhiana. In addition, several of his priceless books have also been lovingly preserved by his daughter-in-law, Harcharan Kaur Ritu, who continues to safeguard this valuable literary legacy with great care at her home. These books are now very old, and many of their pages have become fragile and are slowly deteriorating with time. This is the right time to preserve and digitize his priceless literary works before they are lost forever. By protecting and preserving these books, we can ensure that his writings remain available to readers. The true tribute to Avtar Singh Azad will not be found in ceremonial speeches or occasional remembrance events, but in the preservation and dissemination of his literary heritage.

More than five decades later, the time has come to revisit his contributions with fresh eyes and an open mind. Most importantly, his name deserves the recognition that history has long denied him. The responsibility now lies with literary community, researchers, educational institutions, and cultural academies to ensure that this remarkable son of Punjab finally receives the honour he earned through a lifetime of dedication. His life deserves scholarly research, and his writings deserve inclusion in academic curricula. Literary organizations, universities, Punjabi academies, the Sahitya Akademi, Sikh institutions, and cultural bodies should undertake serious efforts to document, publish, study, preserve, promote and honour his work. In doing so, although the great Punjabi writer Avtar Singh Azad has left this world, his ideals and literary legacy will continue to inspire readers and live in the hearts and minds of people across Punjab and far beyond.

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JKAACL organizes Book Launch Ceremony for Two Poetry Collections



■ JANG S. VERMAN

Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages (JKAACL) organized a book release function at K L Saigal Hall, Writers' Club, Jammu on 25th June, 2026, for the release of two significant literary works- 'Kavitawali', a collection of Dogri poems by the late Balkrishan Badyal 'Chanchal' (1931-2000), edited by Dr. Om Goswami, and 'Bahut Peechhe Se Aata Parkash', a collection of Hindi poems authored by Sh. Sanjeev Bhasin.

In her welcome address, Smt. Harvinder Kour JKAS, Secretary, JKAACL, said that both publications represent rich literary traditions and reflect the Academy's commitment to promoting quality literature. She stated that the primary objective of organizing such book launch programmes is to provide a platform for outstanding literary works before a wider audience of readers, scholars and literary en-

thusiasts. The programme was jointly presided over by eminent literary personalities Padma Shri awardee Prof. Lalit Magotra, renowned Dogri writer and poet, and Prof. Raj Kumar, distinguished Hindi writer and poet. Addressing the gathering, both presiding dignitaries highlighted the vital role of literature in preserving cultural values, strengthening society and inspiring future generations.

Sh. Brij Mohan Sharma IFS, Principal Secretary to Government, Department of Culture, who was the guest of honour, congratulated the Academy, the editor and the author on the publications of the two books. Referring to Kavitawali, he suggested that the life and literary contributions of late Balkrishan Badyal 'Chanchal' should be comprehensively documented and published to inspire future generations. He appreciated JKAACL's sustained efforts in promoting multilingual literature and encouraging cre-

ative writing. Justice (Retd.) G D Sharma, former Judge, who was special guest, lauded the literary contribution of both the publications and underlined the significance of such literary initiatives in enriching society and preserving cultural heritage.

Delivering the Chief Guest's address, Sh. Pawan Gupta, Hon'ble MLA, Udhampur West, observed that language and literature play a pivotal role in shaping society. He reiterated that the promotion of literature, languages and cultural heritage must receive continued priority. He also congratulated the editor and the author of the publication of the two books and JKAACL for organizing meaningful literary events that encourage creative expression.

A scholarly paper on 'Kavitawali' was presented by Shagufta Chowdhary, who highlighted the literary contribution of the late Balkrishan Badyal 'Chanchal' to Dogri literature. Another critical paper on

'Bahut Peechhe Se Aata Parkash' was presented by Dr. Purshotam Kumar, who examined the poetic vision, literary style and thematic richness of the collection.

Speaking on the occasion, Sh. Sanjeev Bhasin shared his experiences and reflections on the creative journey behind his poetry collection. Dr. Om Goswami, editor of Kavitawali, spoke about the process of compiling the volume and the enduring relevance of the late poet's literary legacy.

Air Commodore Suresh Badyal, son of the late Balkrishan Badyal 'Chanchal', expressed gratitude to the Academy for honouring his father's literary contribution and appreciated its efforts towards promoting regional literature and preserving literary heritage.

The proceedings of the programme were conducted by Smt. Reeta Khadyal, Editor, Dogri, while Smt. Sonali Arun Gupta, Additional Secretary, JKAACL, presented the vote of thanks.

Aazaad Parindey Kala Manch stages Nukkad on Nasha Mukht Bharat

■ JANG S. VERMAN

Aazaad Parindey Kala Manch, Jammu performed a powerful street play on the theme 'Nasha Mukht Bharat' at the Excise & Taxation Training Institute, Nagrota on 26th June, 2026. The programme was organized by J&K Excise & Taxation Department, City Excise Range, North Jammu. The performance was presented for the students of an NGO and officials from the Excise & Taxation Department to spread awareness about the harm-



ful effects of drug abuse and promote a drug-free society. The street play featured performances by Sheetal, Seema Mehra, Shally Manhas, Saksham, Amit Bhalla, and Arun, who effectively portrayed the harmful effects

of drug addiction through their impactful performances. On the occasion, Mohit Singh Chib, President of Aazaad Parindey Kala Manch, said that theatre is a powerful medium for

spreading social awareness. He added that the group will continue to perform such street plays in the future to raise awareness on important social issues and contribute towards building a drug-free society.

National Painters' Camp by JKCCA organized at Mansar

■ JANG S. VERMAN

National Painters' Camp organized by Jammu & Kashmir Centre for Creative Arts (JKCCA), Jammu to commemorate the death anniversary of Late Pt. Triloke Kaul, celebrated eminent painter of Jammu & Kashmir was inaugurated by Sh. Madhukar Wanzari, Former HoD Sculpture Department, J J School of Art, Mumbai, today at Mansar (Udhampur) whereas Sh. Jang S. Verman, senior artist from Jammu was the guest of honour on this occasion.

According to Sh. O P Sharma, Founder Director, JKCCA, "The camp is a tribute to Late Pt. Triloke Kaul, the world renowned painter of Jammu & Kashmir who left for his heavenly abode during June, 2025. He informed that Pt. Triloke Kaul (1925-2025) belonged to the first generation of Modern artists of Kashmir and who formed the Progressive Artists Association (PAA) of Kashmir. He said that such art & cultural events like the upcoming National Painters' Camp at Mansar (Udhampur) would help promote the art & culture activity in the area



and provide opportunities to the artists of the country to come closer and share their skills and information regarding the art activities, the mediums and techniques and trends emerging in their respective areas. Senior and young artists from different states/UTs of the country are participating in this camp. The prominent among the participant artists are Yashwant Patel (Vallabh Vidya Nagar, Gujarat); Mohd. Moin (Dehradun, UK); Chitra-kar Jai (Haridwar, UK); Kamal Nain Bhan, O P Sharma, and Shivani Bhat Koul (Jammu, J&K).

Speaking on this occasion, chief guest Sh. Madhukar Wanzari appreciated JKCCA for promoting art and artists by providing them an opportunity

to share their knowledge and mediums of expression in the lap of scenic environment of Jammu & Kashmir (UT). Sh. Jang S. Verman told that the camp whereas will be a tribute to legendary painter Pt. Triloke Kaul, it will also boost the art activity in the region as well as promote the new generation of artist through such events. It may be mentioned here that Jammu & Kashmir Centre for Creative Arts (JKCCA), Jammu is working for the progress, promotion and preservation of different art forms like visual, literary and performing arts. The centre has organized a large number of local, state level and national and international art exhibitions and camps during the last twenty six years of its working.