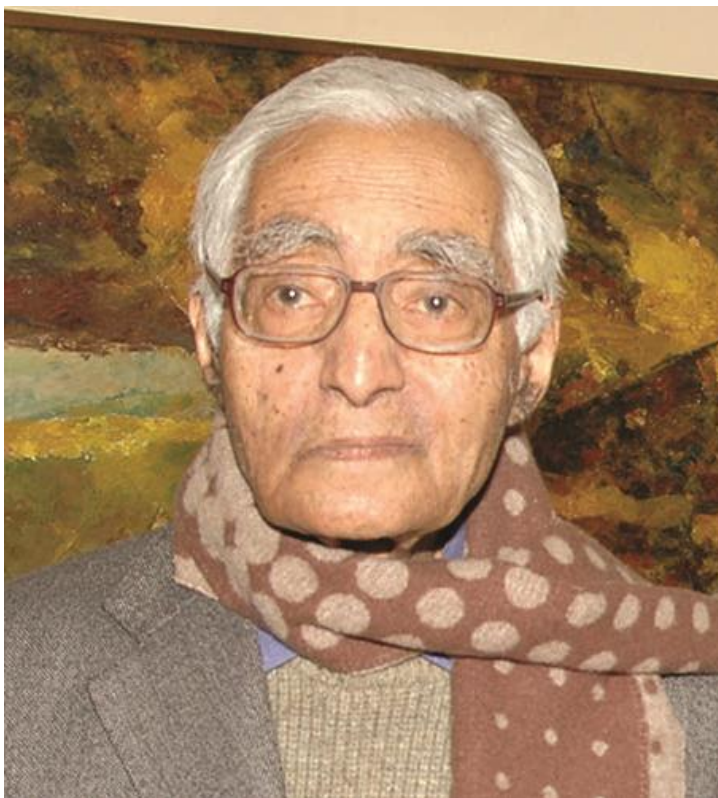


## Two great DU-alumni siblings, Poet – author **Nirmal Verma** and Master Painter Master Painter **Ram Kumar**

*After the death of **the renowned painter Ram Kumar Padma Bhushan 2010**, the artist's friends and close associates talk about his legacy, his commitment to leading a quiet and simple life, and his awe-inspiring artistic achievement. A report by Bhumika Popli*

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Ram Kumar.

‘The influence of nature and the way he applied pigments on the canvas became the language of Ram Kumar. That’s what his work is all about,’ says the critic Prayag Shukla about Ram Kumar, one of India’s foremost modern artists, who **passed away on 14 April at the age of 93.**

Shukla continues: “One who has a lot of substance inside him doesn’t need much experimentation and this element came very naturally to Kumar. Everything progressed at ease for him.”

Kumar’s death marked the end of an era. His paintings, which often fetched big money at art auctions, made him a global icon. But his works conveyed a sense of melancholy and aloofness. He depicted an existential sadness in his much-loved, and always unpeopled landscapes. Kumar’s Benares series of paintings in particular won him great acclaim. He was also awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2010.

As Shukla says, it was difficult for Kumar to raise the prices of his paintings, but he did so the constant behest of his friend and fellow artist **M.F. Husain**. Despite all the riches, though, Kumar preferred a life of quiet and simplicity. Shukla tells the story told to him by Kumar's sister-in-law Gagan Gill. "Kumar once bought a pair of shoes for Rs 2,000 for his servant, and for himself he bought shoes worth Rs 400." Shukla has also curated a show on *Kumar's drawings, which the artist had done in bookkeeping ledgers*.



*Varanasi 1966* by **Ram Kumar**.

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*Untitled 1965* by **Ram Kumar**.

But art wasn't the only calling for Kumar. He once called the art education he was given in school "uninspiring", and wanted instead to become a writer. And he did become a writer.

"Very few people know that Ram Kumar also used to write," says renowned editor and Kumar's friend Om Thanvi. "His **brother, Nirmal Verma was a towering figure in Hindi Literature**. But **Ram Kumar** himself was **a fine fiction writer** and very few people know about it. He started as a story writer only, and not as a painter. **He used to write in Hindi**. Later I also published many of his writings in my paper *Jansatta*, when I was editing it."

Thanvi adds, "Basically, he was a man of Hindi. That was really very strange in Delhi particularly, when we were meeting many painters here, like **Krishen Khanna**, Jatin Das. And Ram Kumar *ji* always used to talk in Hindi. If you look at his paintings, you see most of them were unsigned but later on, when he started signing his artwork, it was also done in Hindi."

According to Thanvi, the master painter bridged the gap between abstract and figurative art. Thanvi gives an example. "The best example is the series of **Benaras** he painted. You can't say those are the Benaras ghats, but they are very much there," he says.