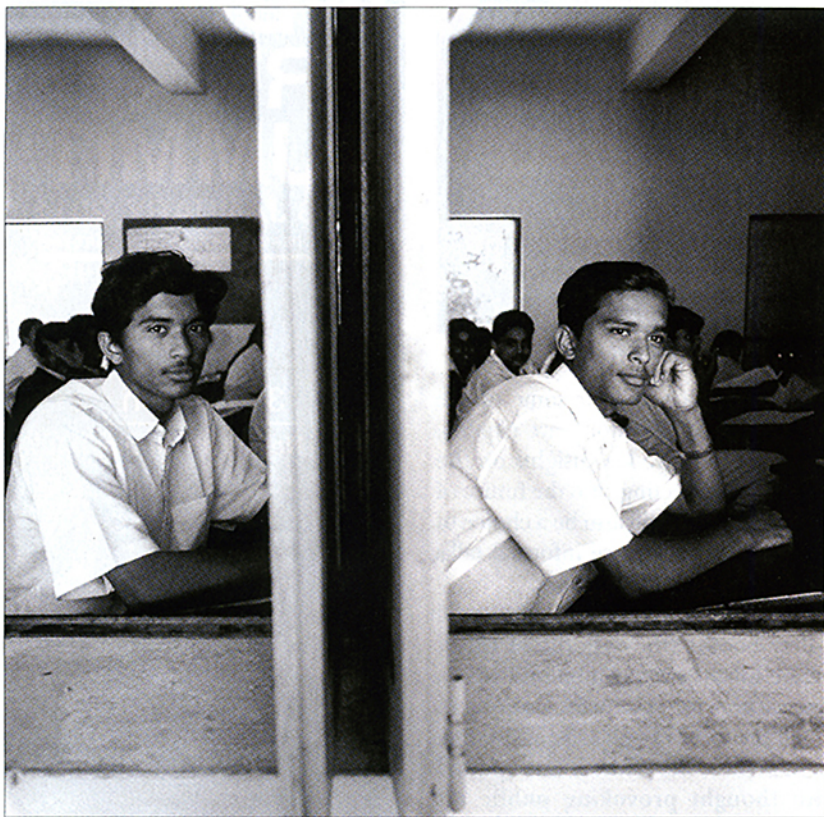


ARTISTS & THEIR ART

LUV AND KUSH, AT SCHOOL, DHARMAJ, GUJARAT, 1988. COURTESY KETAKI SHETHPHOTOINK



Commenting on her Mumbai street photographs, Salman Rushdie had this to say: “Ketaki Sheth’s photographs, so formally interesting, so sharply seen, so deeply felt, give these street lives the greatest gift such work can offer: the dignity of art”. FC2 zooms in on Luv and Kush, as Ketaki goes twinspace

KETAKI SHETH

When I photographed the first set of twin sisters in Harrow, their sequined tunics sparkling in an English drizzle, I hadn’t the faintest idea that this was the beginning of a four year search that would yield more than 100 pairs of Patel twins.

It started at a dinner party in Kent in 1995 where I came across a London ‘directory’ listing all and only Patels, an Indian Gujarati community settled in Britain. It also included information on individual birth dates, occupations and ancestral villages. A 1986 study had reported 30,000 Patels in London - almost certainly an underestimate - and in such a large population it seemed likely that one would find twins. In fact, as I leafed through the pages of the directory, I counted 25 sets of Patel twins in the Greater London area alone. (This figure has more to do with the nature of twinning itself than with any hormonal advantage in Patel women: in any population one in 300 are identical twins and one in 90, fraternal or non-identical. Though it must be said, that three sets of twins appearing in this book were the result of fertility treatment.) I knew then that twinspace might be laborious but that it would have its numbers. My husband, a Patel, helped scan the directory and drew up what became my first Patel twin database.

I first photographed the 25 sets of Patel twins in London. By February 1998, I had found more than 100 pairs, including a few triplets, after journeys which took me to the rural heartland of the Patels - Charotar, in Gujarat, West India - where the story had begun: the story of the Patel farmer who left his homeland at the turn of the

century, sought a new life in East Africa, and ended as a British shopkeeper, ten thousand miles away from his native tobacco and sugarcane plantations.

Featured picture: Luv and Kush, identical twins, b 4-10-1980, are final year students at the HM Patel School in Dharmaj, considered the best school in all the Patel villages. The twins hope to join technical colleges in nearby Vidyanagar and become computer programmers. Their father is a farmer with political ambitions.

- Text excerpted from *Twinspace: Photographs of Patel twins in Britain & India*, by Ketaki Sheth, foreword by Raghuraj Singh, Dewi Lewis Publishing, UK, 1999. ■

(Ketaki Sheth, photographer, (b, 1957, Bombay) continues to work in black and white, with chemistry and silver gelatin prints. She won the Sanskriti Award for Indian photography in 1992 and the Higashikawa Award 2006 in Japan for Best Foreign Photographer. In 2008, her work Bombay Mix was shown at the Fete Du Livre in Aix-en-Provence as a solo show as part of celebrations honouring Salman Rushdie. Her work has been exhibited in India, UK, US, France and Japan. Her first book Twinspace (Dewi Lewis Publishing, UK) was launched in 1999 to critical acclaim. Images from this work were on show at the Tate Modern in 2001 in the exhibition Century City. Her second book, a culmination of 14 years of work, Bombay Mix (Dewi Lewis UK, Sepia International US) was launched in 2007 and exhibited in New York, Bombay, Aix En Provence and Delhi. She is currently photographing the Sidis of India. The exhibition, Twinspace, is currently on view at Photoink.)