

# Double exposure



COURTESY KETAKI SHETH AT PHOTOINK

**Twin seater** Riddhi and Siddhi Patel in London, 1997

Art

Ketaki Sheth documents the lives of Patel twins by doing what she does best, says **Shweta Upadhyay**.

A pair of identical twins look into the camera. Both are wearing black corduroy dresses with white collars. They have the same haircut, the same shooting-target eyes. One is smiling and the other has a creased frown. This is the famous, freakish image of the twins by Diane Arbus.

Ketaki Sheth was "very aware" of this image when she attended a Diwali party in Kent and discovered that the Patel community had an large number of twins. She later learned that one in 300 members of the Gujarati community is an identical twin, and one in 90 a fraternal twin. She was excited by the statistic, and decided to capture it using her lens. "I had not set out to do a book on twins," Sheth explained, in an email interview. "But I thought using the icon of twins could be an unusual way of doing a series of portraits in a community."

The monochrome photographs of her collection *Twinspotting*, which was released as a book in 1999, diligently document these Patel twins from Britain and Gujarat. Upon returning from England, armed with directories of Patels in Britain, she discovered

many double birthdates in the family data.

Her husband, "a Mac fiend, a graphic designer and an 'outsider' Patel", built a database of all the double birthdates. "We learned that there were almost a hundred sets of Patel twins between 18 months and 77 years old, living all over England," she said. Then she began writing them letters, asking to photograph them ("In those days most people were not on email," she explained). Most replied immediately.

Shooting *Twinspotting*, Sheth used a slightly wide-angle lens – the equivalent of a 35mm but in square-medium format – to capture that environment. "The square format worked perfectly for portraits of twins. I tried to use the edges of the frames for suggestion of details and for the form of the photograph," she said. She discovered places like Chatham and Cheam and Norbury and Lee, "all sorts of tiny towns tucked away in the greyness of small-town England". She It was this quality of light, seasons and interiors that provided the contrast when she later photographed Patel twins in India: the British twins sit in cars or parks or are silhouetted against walls, while the twins in Charotar stand amidst farms and orchards identical and worlds apart.

*Twinspotting opens on Mon Aug 23 at Photoink. See Photography.*