

Patel twins in sharp focus



Ketaki Sheth's *Ridhi-Sidhi*

SHWETA SHARMA

When Ketaki Sheth first clicked a set of Patel twins on a drizzly afternoon in Harrow, London, in 1995, she had no idea she would end up creating photo studies of more than 100 sets of twins of the same community, or that a remarkable, striking book would emerge from the exercise.

Chancing upon a directory listing 30,000 Patels in the UK, Sheth, a winner of the Sanskriti award for photography, set out to make portraits of Patel twins that she juxtaposed with portraits of Patel twins in India. This work was published in a book, *Twinspotting: Photographs of Patel Twins in Britain and India*, in 1999, but now, a decade later, her works have gone on display in Delhi's discerning PhotoInk gallery.

"I did not start the project out of any fascination for twins. I just wanted to see if I could capture a community, using twins as a visual icon," says Sheth. Thankful that she had no deadline to adhere to, Sheth took her time, working on the series for four years. Her subjects all belong to the Hindu Patel community in Gujarat, both those that remain in the state and those that travelled to England and added to the Indian diaspora there.

"I travelled extensively in

Britain, through small towns and big cities, from corner shops to factories, from temples to parks and finally to the homes frequented and lived in by the Patel community. By the end of my journey I had about 100 sets of photographs of Patels of various ages. Some were as young as 16 months while some were 78 years old. This included Indian Patels of Charotar in Gujarat, a region that has around 40 villages made up only of the Patel community," Sheth told *Guardian* 20.

Sheth, who calls herself a photographer and not an anthropologist documenting culture, ritual, language or religion, agrees that one cannot work in isolation, and that she had to become involved with the community during the project.

"Often I only met my subjects once — at the time of the picture — and would try and extend these sessions for as long as I could, to get a sense of their personalities, hoping to capture that in the portrait," says Sheth. Her biggest challenge was that she could not go back to her subjects because of the distances involved.

"It took me an enormously long time. I had to keep a huge database of all the places and people I visited. I was consistently trying to get it all right, just in one go!" said Sheth. *Twinspotting* is on till October 16 at the PhotoInk Gallery.