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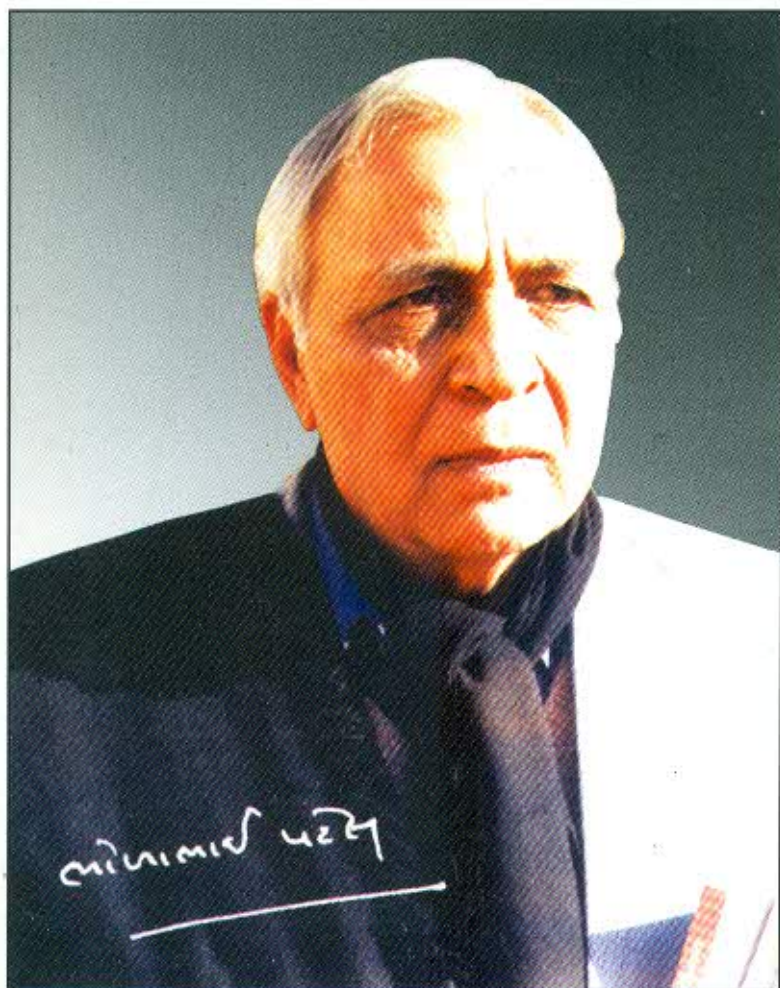
Gujarat Sahitya
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invite you to
meet the author

Bholabhai Patel





Bholabhai Patel was born in a farming family in a village called *Soja* in the Gandhinagar District of Gujarat. His father was a school teacher and hence though he had close association with the farmland, right from his childhood he had been in touch with books and this association over the years developed into a deep love. Today he is a Bookworm in the literal sense. Those days *Soja* was under the Princely state of Baroda and had a village library which Bholabhai used avidly in his young days. As a young boy Bholabhai had to work in the farm but his mind was never in it. Once at a friend's house he came across Vyas Vallabhram's *Mahabharat* which was composed in classical ragas. This book opened up a new world for young Bholabhai. He got acquainted with works of Gijubhai and those of Nanabhai Bhatt who later gained fame as an educationist. His *Ramayana Patro*, *Mahabharata Patro* and monthly magazine *Balmitra* gave right direction to Bholabhai's reading. The stories of King Vikramaditya's throne too opened a new imaginative world for him. His elderly neighbour *Kashi Foi* introduced him to Jain narrative lores.

Bholabhai studied in his village till standard Seventh. Then in 1948 he went to Kadi village at *Sarva Vidyalaya* to study as a resident student. In the tenth standard only he tried to compose poems keeping within the rigour of meters. He not only attempted to translate Sanskrit shlokas into Gujarati but even wrote a narrative poem of two stanzas of two hundred lines. The school not only developed his interest and love

for books but also gave impetus to his wonder list by arranging various travel trips to different parts of the country.

During his school days he read the works of Nanalal, Kalidas, Rabindranath Tagore, Sharadchandra, V.S. Khandekar, Sane Guruji, Tarashankar and others. He also read the plays of Arobindo. After matriculation he enrolled in the L.D. Arts College, Ahmedabad to do his B. A. but on the day the new term was to commence he joined Mansa High school as a teacher. He regretted not being able to join college but at the same time enjoyed being a class teacher.

In 1957 he took his B.A. examination and in 1958 he enrolled in the St. Xavier's College to do his M.A. In 1960 he completed his M.A. in Hindi and was ranked first in the university. He then joined Sardar Patel college, Ahmedabad as a lecturer in Hindi. Along with Hindi he studied Sanskrit literature and further cultivated his interest in English literature too. Under the tutorship of Nagindas Parekh he along with Anila Dalal undertook an indepth study of Bengali language and Tagore literature. He even learnt German and enrolled as a post-graduate student at the school of languages and obtained an M.A. degree in English literature. While studying for his master's degree at the school of languages, he was appointed there as a lecturer in Hindi. Umashankar Joshi was then the Director of school of languages and the Chancellor of the University. During this period he came in close contacts with academicians like Harivallabh Bhayani. He undertook to do his Ph.D. under the guidance of Ambashankar Nagar, Head, Hindi Department. For doctoral work he chose to do a critical assessment of the works of Ajaneya. Meanwhile he even secured a diploma in Linguistics. With his academic endeavour he continued to be active in the field of writing.

In 1979 he toured the North East – Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland and Assam. He brought out an anthology of Assamese poetry. He was invited by the Vishwa Bharati University as a fellow of the Comparative Indian Literature for a year (February 1983 to January 1984). This enabled him to come in close contact with Bengali literature and literary personalities. As a result, he gained an in depth understanding of Tagore literature. His acquaintance there with such Tagore admirers and scholars like Ketaki Kushari Dyson and Martin Champchen made his stay very fruitful. Martin Champchen brought him in direct contact with the 'Bauls'. He also became a close associate at the Department of Comparative Literature at the Jadavpur University. In 1989, Bholabhai, Anila Dalal and few others went on a conducted tour of the Western Europe and the United States. Europe's heritage of art and the United State's natural beauty left an indelible mark on him. Afterwards at the invitation of the UK based Gujarati Literary Academy he went as the chief guest to the conference held at Bedford. He visited some selective places in the United Kingdom and the U. S.

In the 60s modernist trends were apparent in Gujarati Literature. Niranjan Bhagat was one of its foremost exponents. Along with symbolist and imagist poetry Gujarati literature welcomed modern criticism's formalistic approach. The literary scene was agog with

discourse on pure poetry. Suresh Joshi and other fellow writers were writing about Western works and poetic principles in *Kshitij*. Gujarati poets had started writing in free verse. In prose Sartre, Camus, Kafka were on everybody's lips. It is in this literary ambience that Bholabhai started his writing activity through his research articles and book reviews published in *Granth* a monthly literary journal. He gained fame as formalistic critic. In 1973 compilation of his critical articles appeared in a book form entitled *Adhuna*. After that came *Purvapur* (1976), *Kalpurush* (1979) and others. His in depth study of Indian and Western literature gets clearly reflected in his analysis especially his comparative mode of criticism. His wide reading and understanding of Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi, Assamese, Oriya and other Indian languages and also his exposure through English of the great works of the European literature have helped him to cultivate a catholic taste in literature. As a result he approaches a work of writing with an open mind and assesses it for its aesthetic value. So his thesis on Hindi litterateur *Ajaneya* has a distinct place in comparison to the progressive critical standard of other Hindi critics.

After being adjudged a Fellow of the Comparative Indian Literature by the K.K. Birla Foundation, Bholabhai has researched in the field of tradition of Indian novel and has written a book on the subject which will be soon published. The source of his wide



ranging interest in various Indian literature lies in his desire to learn different languages. This love for languages has led him to his favourite activity of translation. Besides being a critic Bholabhai has also been very active in the realm of translation. He has served as a bridge between Hindi and Gujarati Literature.

He had started translating from Bengali into Gujarati under the guidance of Nagindas Parekh. His translation of the Bengali poet *Jibananda Das*' selected poems entitled *Banalata Sen* which appeared in the series entitled *Nishit Purashkar Granthmala* (edited by Umashankar Joshi) gained widespread recognition. The well know Bengali literary figure Debesh Ray has acclaimed this effort. Bholabhai has also translated into Gujarati Tagore's *Char Adhyay* and many of his poems. His *Adhunik Bengali Kavita* comprises poems of major Bengali poets.

His inexhaustible wonder lust has given Gujarati literature an acclaimed travelogue writer. Tagore's line *Gami Sudver piyasi* is an apt description of his travels. His entry in the field of creative essay writing was in a way accidental. He had been asked by Niranjan Bhagat to contribute a creative piece of writing in his literary journal *Sahitya*. Pondering over the topic he wrote an essay about the ancient city of Vidisha now in Madhya Pradesh. The source was his travel in these parts which he had undertaken. In his essay he was able to create a compassionate ambience wherein the present Bhilsa and Kalidasa's ancient Vidisha, present day Betwa river and Kalidasa's Betravati intermingle to turn his travel essay into a fine piece of creative writing. This article was widely acclaimed when it was published and the editor of *Sahitya* requested him to contribute similar kind of essays in all its forthcoming issues. His travel around the country provided the subject matter for his other essays which later were

published in a book titled *Vidisha*. The renowned portrait painter Ashwin Mehta wrote about this book, "Travelogues like *Vidisha* has been written in Gujarati and it is doubtful that it will ever be written". Niranjan Bhagat wrote, "Essays of *Vidisha* give a fulfillment which is based on author's unique style, his mature appreciation and fine feeling". According to Raghuvir Chaudhary, "Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Suresh Joshi and Digish Mehta have enriched Gujarati Literature through their contribution in the field of creative essay writing. Bholabhai's travel essays have further enhanced this field".

Bholabhai to date has contributed to the Gujarati literature around ten volumes of essays and travelogues. Some of these like *Kanchanjanga*, *Shalbhanjika*, *Chaitar Chamke Chandni*, *Devatma Himalaya* and *Drashyavali* have gained wide recognition. In 1992 he received the Sahitya Akademi prize for his *Devoni Ghati*. The wellknown Mumbai based journalist *Kupmunduk* has rightly observed that Bholabhai has a beautiful style, a heart of a compassionate artist and an imagination of a poet.

He has also rendered a great service to Gujarati literature by being the editor of Gujarati Sahitya Parishad's organ *Parab* for many years. From 1974 till date he has been closely associated with this literary journal. He is also a member of the K. K. Birla Foundation's selection committee for deciding *Vyas samman* the highest prize given to the best Hindi creative work.

Bholabhai has been a recipient of many prizes and awards for his service to literature. He has been awarded the Gujarat Sahitya Sabha's prestigious *Ranjitram Suvarnachandrak*. From 1993-97 he was on the executive board of the Sahitya Akademi, Delhi. At present he is the president of the Gujarat Sahitya Academy, Gandhinagar.

A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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CHRONOLOGY

- 1934 Born on 7 August at Soja, Dist. Gandhinagar
- 1948 Married to Shakuben Patel, Mansa
- 1952 Joined as a teacher
- 1960 M. A. with Hindi, Sanskrit
- 1963 First article published in *Sanskriti* (edi. Umashankar Joshi)
- 1968 Translation of *Nishith & Prachina* in Hindi with Raghuveer Chaudhari
- 1969 Joined as lecturer in Hindi, School of Languages, Gujarat Uni., Ahmedabad
- 1970 M.A. (English-Linguistics)
- 1971 Diploma in German Language
- 1973 First collection of critical writings, *Adhuna* published
- 1974 Editor, *PARAB* Literary Magazine of Gujarati Sahitya Parishad (till to-date)
- 1975 Diploma in Linguistics
- 1977 Awarded Ph.D, degree in Hindi
- 1978 Travelled extensively in North-East India
- 1980 *Vidisha* first collection of essays published. Received Kaka Kalelkar Paritoshik
- 1983-84 Invited as Visiting Fellow in Comparative Indian Literature by Vishwa Bharati, Shantiniketan for a year. Visited Assam
- 1984 Invited as Chief Guest Visuv Milan (Cuttuck) All Orissa Literary Conference
- 1985 Delivered *Narmad Vyakhyanmala* at South Gujarat University, Surat
- 1986 Invited by Govt. of West Bengal to participate in Tagore's 125th Birth Anniversary Celebrations at Kolkata
- 1987 Appointed as Professor & Head Dept.of Hindi, Gujarat University
- 1989 Visited Western Europe & America
Awarded Sauhard Puraskar by U.P. Hindi Sansthan, Lucknow
- 1990 National Lecturer in Hindi Award by UGC
- 1992 Sahitya Akademi, Delhi Award for *Devoni Ghati*
- 1993-97 Member, Executive Board, Sahitya Akademi, Delhi
Ghanshyamdas Saraf Sarvotam Sahitya Puraskar for *Devatatma Himalaya*
- 1994 Jethalal Joshi (Hindi) Puraskar
- 1994 Retired from Gujarat University
- 1995 Awarded Ranjitram Suvarnachandrak
- 1996-97 K. K. Birla foundation fellow in Comparative Indian Literature
- 1998 Elected as President Gujarat Sahitya Academy, Gandhinagar for five years
- 1998-99 UGC Emeritus Fellow for a year
- 1999 Sahitya Akademi Prize for Translation (Tr. *Iyaruingang*)
- 1999 Participated in Nazrul Islam Birth Centenary International Seminar, Kolkata
- 2000 Inaugurated Jibananand Das Birth Centenary Seminar at Kolkata
Chief Guest 6th Gujarati Conference held at Bedford (U. K.)
Visited U. K., U. S. A.
- 2001 Hindi Sevi Samman, Hindi Sahitya Academy, Gandhinagar

with young Oriya writers

