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Sahitya Akademi

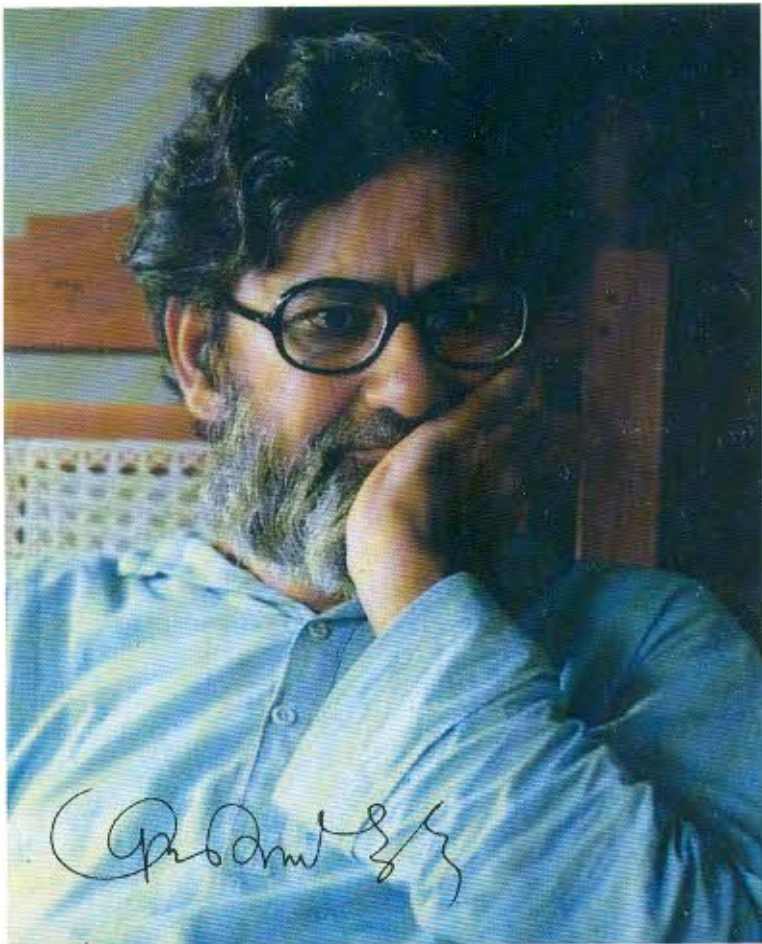


India International Centre

Invite you to

meet the author

Gulammohammed Sheikh



"Just as it is now understood that literature may be a more important teacher of history than mere recorded events can be, the act of painting, by bringing the world into paint, brings it in fact into existence."



An artist, poet and art critic, Gulammohammed Sheikh is a pioneer of modern Gujarati poetry of post-independence era — writing with a painter's sensibility and an uncanny sense for the distilled language of images and symbols.

Born in 1937 at Surendranagar, a town in north Gujarat, Gulammohammed joined M.S. University, Baroda in 1955 to have formal training in painting. He took his Master's degree in painting in 1961 and started teaching Art History in the same University.

Witnessing a close convergence of Hindu and Muslim rituals and ceremonies from childhood, Gulammohammed moved freely with the friends of other faiths. He used to recite the Quran at home and learnt Sanskrit at school. Young Gulam's school days were spent in painting, visit-

Gulammohammed Sheikh

ing libraries and editing handwritten and illustrated wall journals. He started writing poems in Gujarati from his school days.

On his creative experience, Sri Gulammohammed says that the world always comes to him "invariably manifold, plural or at least dual in form. In art, paintings come to me in the company of poetry overlapping and yet independent of each other."

The Baroda experience opened up before him many avenues of interest and exploration, both creative and intellectual, literary and visual.

During this period, he came into contact with Suresh Joshi, an eminent litterateur which resulted in his deep involvement in the movement of contemporary poetry in Gujarati for nearly three decades.

Sheikh's first series of *Achhandas* (Free verse) poems were published in the journals *Vishwamanav* and *Kshitij* in the late fifties. *Sanskriti*, *Kumar* and *Milap* were the other journals, which published his poems. The literary sensibility of Gulam is as fine as his sensibility as a painter and he has acknowledged that a chief source of his imagery in painting is poetry.

Gulam Mohammed Sheikh went to England to study at the Royal College of Art, London on Commonwealth scholarship (1963-1966). He travelled extensively in Europe during this period. On his return from England, Sheikh began in 1968, a series of free form writings, *Gher Jatan* (Returning Home), which he continues even today.

Gulam Mohamed Sheikh has designed journals and books and introduced contemporary art in literary publications. From 1969 to 1973,

he co-edited and published a journal *Vrischik*—a journal of arts and ideas which played an active role in the Artists' Protest Movement, 'Group 1890'. Sheikh raised issues pertaining to the reinterpretation of traditional and modern art in the contemporary Indian context. His collection of poems entitled *Athawa* with his own illustrations was brought out in 1974. Translations of some of the poems in the volume are included in the *Penguin New Writing in India*. Since then Sheikh's



With Smt. Pupul Jayakar during the exhibition at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1985.

writings have regularly been published in Gujarati, Hindi and English journals.

One of the most innovative poets of Gujarat, Gulam-mohammed made bold experiments in theme and metrics and was one of the first poets to explore *vers libre* in Gujarati. Being a painter, he introduces fresh and stimulating perspectives of form, shape, line, tone, colour, texture, space and movement. He presents his poems not in sequences but in juxtapositions of images. The language he uses reveals transgressions of literary taboos and violent deviations from the natural norms of syntactical compatibility and expectations of verbal structuring. There is also a certain sensuous physicality in his poems.

An artist or poet must be vulnerable and highly receptive to his environment. Sheikh's art is a fiction born of personally known facts and events. His innovations in



Reading his recent poems/prose at a literary gathering 'Sahridaya' in Bombay, 1989. Sri Bharat Naik is with him.

narrative are not merely a private decision or simply the outcome of a purely aesthetic process but largely the functions of pressure created by the configuration of the forces in Indian reality. Sheikh's art does the function of social criticism too.

So far, Gulam has participated in 42 art exhibitions in India and abroad, six of them solo exhibitions. He received the national award in painting in 1962 and was honoured with the *Padmashri* by the Government of India in 1983. Sheikh continues to teach Art History in the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University, Baroda even today. His wife Nilima Sheikh is also a popular painter. Gulam has recently edited a volume of *Contemporary Art in Baroda* and a comprehensive volume on art in Gujarati in Gnanagangotri series of publications. At present he is engaged in writing the concluding part of *Gher Jatan*.



Talking to the students of the College of Visual Art, Mysore, 1986

LITERARY WORKS

Poetic Works

Poems published in *Vishwamanav*, *Kshiti*, *Kumar*, *Sanskriti*, *Milap* etc. from 1955 onwards.

Athawa, collection of poems brought out in 1974.

Prose Writings

Prose writings of *Gher Jatan* published in *Uhapoh*, *Etad*, *Gadyaparva*, 1968 onwards.

Essays on Art

Essays on art published in *Vishwamanav*, *Kshiti*, *Sayujya*, *Etad* etc.

Series of essays on history of art, *Vishwamanav* (1957-63) and other essays on art in *Marg*, *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, *Lalit Kala Contemporary* and *Interrogating Modernity*.

Edited Works

Edited a special number on visual art of *Kshiti* (1963).

Paroksa (Papers of the Coomaraswamy Centenary Seminar) edited with K.G. Subramanyam and Kapila Vatsyayan, 1983.

Translations

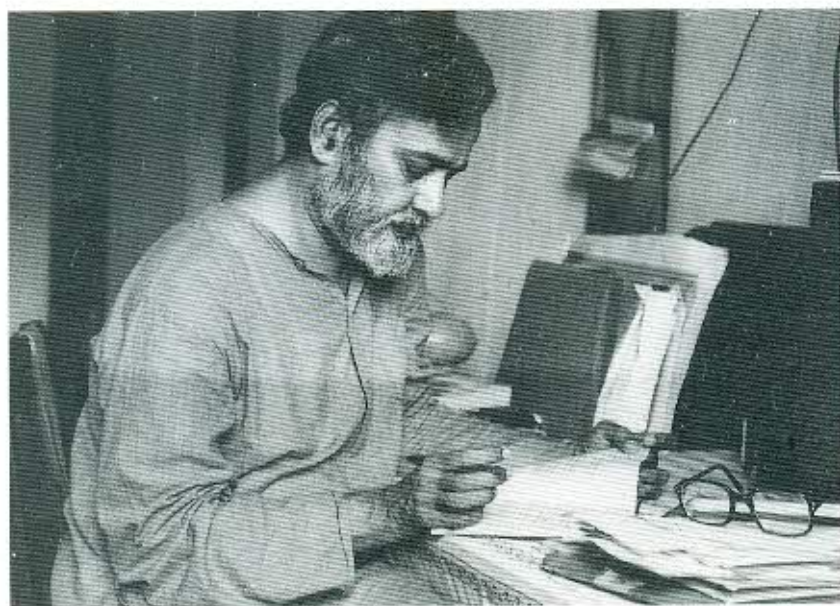
Translations of his poems published in *Sakshatkar*, *Satyakatha*, *Vagaratha*, *New Writing in India*, *Another India*, *Indian Poetry Today*, etc.

Translations of *Gher Jatan* in *Pahal*, *Samakaleena Bharatiya Sahitya*, *Setu Aspect*, *Chicago Review*, *The Penguin New Writing in India*, etc.

Forthcoming Books

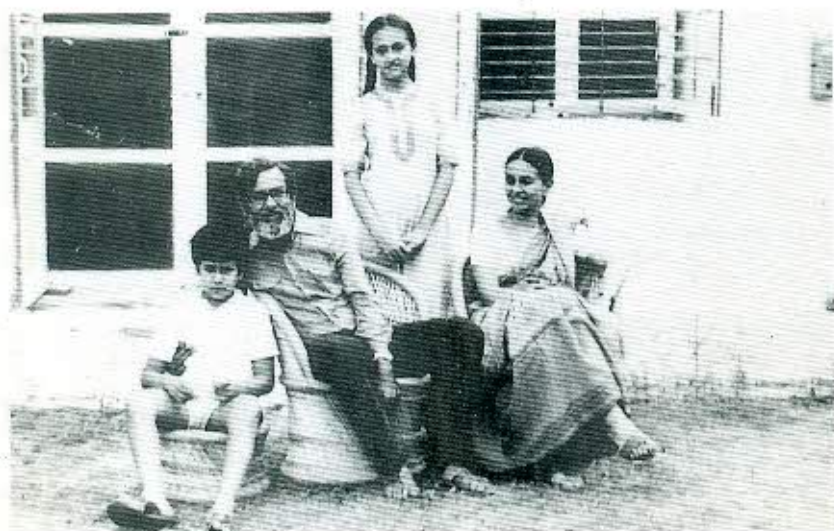
A volume (ed) on Contemporary Art in Baroda.

A comprehensive volume (ed.) on art in the Gnanagangotri series (Gen. Editor, Bhogilal Gandhi) of publications (Gujarati) to be brought out by Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar.



A Chronology

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| <p>1937 : Birth</p> <p>1955 : Had formal training in painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University, Baroda.</p> <p>1961 : Took his Master's degree and started teaching Art History at the Faculty.</p> <p>1962 : Received national award in painting.</p> <p>1963 : Founded 'Group 1890'. Studied in Royal College of Art, London up to 1966.</p> <p>1966 : Return to India and took up teaching at Baroda.</p> <p>1967 : Participated in Cinquieme Biennale de Paris.</p> <p>1969-73: Co-edited and published <i>Vrischik</i>.</p> <p>1974 : Published <i>Athawa</i>, a collection of his poems.</p> <p>1982 : Professor and Head of the Dept. of</p> | <p>Painting, Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda.</p> <p>1983 : Received <i>Padmashri</i>.</p> <p>1984 : Participated in 15th International Art Exhibition, Tokyo.</p> <p>1985 : Invited by Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris to exhibit his paintings during the Festival of India in France.</p> <p>1986 : Participated in the Smithsonian Institution Symposium during the Festival of India in USA.</p> <p>1987 : Invited as Visiting Artist at Art Institute, Chicago.</p> <p>1991 : Latest solo exhibition at CMC Art Gallery, New Delhi.</p> <p>1993 : Maharashtra Quake Relief Show, Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda.</p> |
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With his wife Nilina, daughter Samira and son Kabir, 1982.