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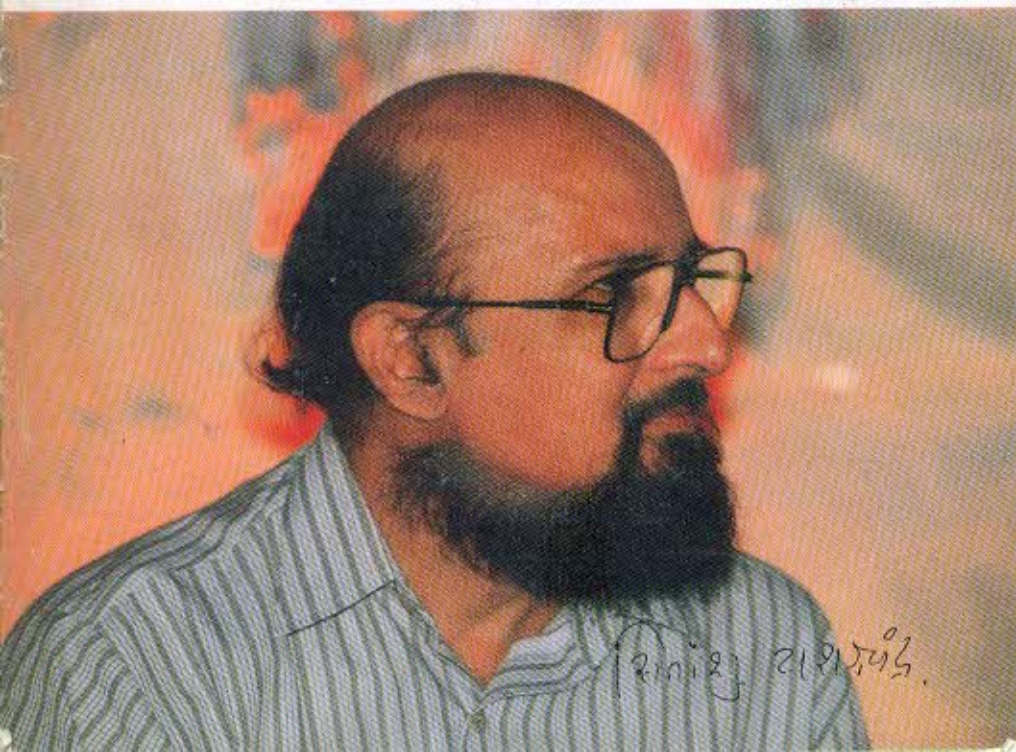


India International Centre

invite you to

meet the author

Sitanshu Yashaschandra



A pathfinder among contemporary Indian poets, a dramatist regarded with esteem alike by professional and experimental Gujarati theatre and a refreshingly insightful literary theorist, Sitanshu Yashaschandra has been described as a poet of *Ajanabahu udgar* ("far reaching expression"), capable of encompassing a widespread reality. A contemporary Hindi poet has, in a poem "Jal hi Jal" ("Water, more water") likened him with some ancient well in a distant village, where waters have a link, through the shattered rocks at its bottom, with the primordial waters of a subterranean sea.

Born in 1941 at Bhuj, Kutch, to Pankajnayana and

Yashaschandra Mehta, Sitanshu had his early schooling at Bhuj and Vadodara. His father, who was Chief Justice of the native state of Kutch (his great grandfather was Diwan of the state of Kutch and Vadodara), died at 52 in 1947 and his mother shifted her family to Mumbai in 1951. Sitanshu's first collection of poems, *Odyseusmu Halesu* (1975) in times of dedication, acknowledges the poet's debt to his mother.

From *Odyseusmu Halesu* to recent poems like "Simhavahini Stotra", "Ranakhya/Jalastotra" and "Pyalo" (re-employing many pre-modern genres of Indian poetry), Sitanshu Yashaschandra's poetry marks some of the highest points of modernity.



With the former President of India R. Venkataraman



With Shakti Chattopadhyay at Nalanda 1976

Labhshankar Thakar, another major voice in contemporary poetry, notes: "I am always curious to know the whereabouts of two poets working in my language: Umashankar (Joshi) holds his chisel on the notions of Death and Evil ... where are Sitanshu's filaments attached since the completion of 'Jatayu', that is a subject of my curiosity." (1984). A younger contemporary poet, Nitin Mehta, views him as 'a poet of creative intelligence, who, through his ceaseless experiments and audacious use of language, has opened up new dimensions of Gujarati speech and of human existence.'

His poems have been translated into Marathi, Bengali,

Hindi, English, French, German and Russian.

As a playwright, Sitanshu Yashaschandra has worked clearly with theatre, producing performance-oriented structure of action and languages in his plays. Utkarsh Majumdar, who co-directed his play, *A Manas Madrasi Lage Chhe*, has described it as "a play significant not only for Gujarati language but also in the history of Indian theatre". His other plays include *Kem Mahanji Kya Chalya* and *Khogras*. Both have been staged on many occasions and festivals. Professional theatre companies have also performed several of his plays, quite successfully, with Paresh Raval, Shafi Inamdar, Ratna

Pathak-Shah, Pravin Joshi, Sarita Joshi, Arvind Joshi, Arvind Thakkar, Daisy Irani, Rubi Patel, Burjar Patel, Naushil Mehta and other directors and actors of great renown participating in them.

Another dimension of his work concerns literary criticism and theory. A doctorate in Comparative Literature from the USA and also in Gujarati (and Sanskrit) from Bombay University, the refreshingly insightful research of Sitanshu's doctoral work has been welcomed by even a sagacious critic like Acharya Vishnu-prashad Trivedi. About *Ramani Yatano Vagvikalpa* he writes, it is a *prakarangranth*. Works of this calibre, discussing epistemology of poetry, are rare in our languages (1981).

His literary achievements have brought him many honours. He received the Kavi Nanalal Parotoshik from Gujarati Sahitya Parishad, Gujarati State Award for poetry, the Jayant Pathak Award for the best collection of poems and the Ramaprasad Bakshi Award for his book *Ramani Yatano Vagvikalpa* (1979). *Simanhan ane Simollanhan* (1977) won for him the Gujarat State



With his wife, daughter and son

Award, Sahitya Akademi Award for *Jatayu* and the Ramkrishna Jaidayal National Harmony Award for poetry and drama.

Sitanshu Yashaschandra has been invited to lecture/research at Sorbonne University, Paris (1998) and to conferences in USSR, Korea, Germany, France to present papers on Indian literature, medieval Gujarati culture and literature and on the Gujarati cultural context of Mahatma Gandhi. Sitanshu Yashaschandra worked as Chief Editor of the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature* at Sahitya Akademi from 1977-82.

Bibliography

Odysseusmu Halesu, 1975, poems.
Simanhan ane Simollanhan,

1977, comparative literature.
Ramani Yatano Vagvikalpa, 1979, aesthetics.

Mohen-jo dado (Poems on Audio-cassette). 1978.

Jatayu, poems. 1986.

A Manas Madrasi Lage Chhe, 1999, play.

Kem Mahanji Kya Chalya, 1999, play.

Khagras, 1999, play.

Ashvatthama, 1999, play.

Varishakhi Koyal, 1999, adaptation.

Lady Lalkuvar, 1999, adaptation.

Tokhar, 1999, adaptation.

Chhabili Ramati Chhanamann, 1999, adaptation.

Vem Mahanji Kya Chalya, translated into for *Rang-Prasang* (journal of NSD), Ed Prayag Shukla.

A Chronology

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|---------|---|------|---|
| 1941 | Born at Bhuj, Kutch | 1976 | Received Doctorate in Gujarati from Bombay University. |
| 1962-65 | Early poems published. | 1977 | Received Doctorate in Comparative Literature from Indiana University, USA. |
| 1965 | Master's degree in Gujarati-Sanskrit. | 1977 | Appointed Chief Editor, <i>Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature</i> at Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. |
| 1965-68 | Taught at Somani College, Mumbai. | 1978 | Visited South Korea; <i>Kem Mahanji Kya Chalya</i> performed on A.I.R., Mumbai. |
| 1966 | Married Anjani Dholakiya. | 1979 | Invited to USSR to read poetry at Pushkin Poetry Festival. |
| 1968 | Received Fulbright Scholarship at Indiana University, USA. | 1979 | <i>Ramani Yatano Vagvikalpa</i> , book on aesthetics, published; Received Ramprasad Bakshi Award. |
| 1970 | Master's Degree in Letters and Comparative Literature; Awarded Ford West European Fellowship. | 1982 | Appointed Professor and Head, Department of Gujarati, M.S. University of Baroda. |
| 1971-72 | Awarded Paris Ford Fellowship. | | |
| 1975 | <i>Odysseusnu Halesu</i> , collection of poems, published; Received Gujarati Sahitya Parishad Award and Gujarat State Award for poetry. | | |

- 1986 *Jatayu*, collection of poems published; Received Sahitya Akademi Award; Invited to Frankfurt; German translation of his poems anthologised by Alokeranjan Dasgupta.
- 1987 Received Ranjeetram Suvarna Chandrah for poetry, drama and criticism.
- 1988 Invited to Berlin.
- 1990 Appointed Vice-Chancellor, Saurashtra University (1990-93).
- 1991 Invited to work on Chicago University's NEH Project on "Literary Cultural History: A Reconstruction from South Asia."
- 1992 Founded "Institute of Indian Culture and Literature" at Saurashtra University.
- 1996 Ramkrishna Jaidayal National Harmony Award for poetry and drama, Indiana University, USA.
- 1997 Received Kabir Samman for poetry, drama and criticism.
- 1998 Invited by Sorbonne University, Paris to give lectures.
- 1999 Collected plays in eight parts, published by R.R. Sheth, Mumbai.



Receiving Kabir Samman 1998 from Digvijay Singh, Chief Minister of Mahhya Pradesh, Bhopal