

# **Quest for Excellence**

**A biography of Devendra Patel**

Devendra Patel was born on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1945 at Bayad, a small town in the district of Sabarkantha, Gujarat. His native is Akrund, a small village there. He was born to Gandhian parents Jesingbhai Patel and Revaben Patel. His father Jesingbhai saw India's freedom movement from very close and played a major role in his small village too, to free it from the clutches of the landlords and colonial impositions. Akrund was owned by one such Phanse family with such rights, that he freed for the people. Still he had a mutual bond of respect for scholars like Krishna Kumar Phanse from the same family, against whom he fought.

He put his one and only son in government primary school to study. To him, the best a father could give his son would be the best possible education. Those days, the newspapers

reached the village centers by post the next day. Jesingbhai and others used to go to the school to read newspaper and inspired his son to read newspapers to keep him aware of the world around. Those days, a new children weekly 'Zagmag' was started, that his son fondly liked to read, especially the characters 'Chhel ane Chhabo', 'Chhako-Mako' and 'Mia Fuski and Tabha Bhatt' created by the writer Jivaram Joshi. By seventh level in school, he started reading mystery stories of N.J. Golibar, detective stories and books like 'Baraf ni shahjadi', without the knowledge of his father.

In the meantime, a high school was started in a rental house

there. The father wanted to make his son either an engineer or an IAS officer. Those days, an IAS officer named iswaran posted in Gujarat, was seen as a milestone for young students to reach at, but Jesingbhai's son was dreaming something else. A teacher, Kodarbhai Jaiswal was teaching Sanskrit in the high school and the boy started liking Sanskrit and English both. The boy, Devendra, participated in plays like 'Mithyabhiman' too.

## **EDUCATION AT SHREYAS**

To give devendra the best education, his father tried to get an admission for him at D.N. high school at Anand and Sarva Vidyalaya kadi, but the big schools refused to give admission to a boy from a small village. Finally, he got the admission at Shreyas high school, Ahmedabad, a school run by leenaben Mangaldas, the daughter of Ambalal Sarabhai. The school was very famous as one of the best schools not only in India, but also in other countries too. Leenaben was the sister of great scientist Dr. Vikram Sarabhai. The children of NRI Gujarati's from Africa also studied in this school. Devendra got an opportunity to study with the children of Dr. Vikram Sarabhai; Mallika and kartikeya Sarabhai and also the children of mill owner Jaikrishna Harivallabhdas. They had teachers like pro. Lakdawala for maths, Chhotubhai Nayak for

English, Pransukh Nayak for acting, Pal babu for painting etc. It was mandatory to learn music, swimming, table tennis, badminton, volleyball, cricket etc. at the school and the best possible coaching was also provided.

Ambalal Sarabhai was living at retreat bungalow near Shahibaug underbridge, spread in to 27 acres of land. It was like a botanical garden. Ambalal Sarabhai was the owner of Calico mills, Ahmadabad. There were more than 30 gardeners in his lovely garden. A rare kind of roses were grown there. A part of this retreat bungalow was used as a hostel and only 15 students including girls and boys were allowed to stay in the hostel and they all lived like a big family. The princess of Sanand Thakore; Prakash kuvar ba and two princes Durgaprasad and Mahakaliprasad and son of Parle owner Jitendra Chauhan were also staying in this hostel. The hostel warden was Dulariben Varshney, staying with her husband kanjbihariji Varshney and children.

Leenaben sarabhai herself was a very good writer, who translated Homer's epic 'Iliad' into Gujarati. Nobody needs the introduction to the story of 'Helen of troy' today. The great Greek tragedy is taught in the universities all over the world. Shreyas school taught epic as a part of curriculum every year along with the culture of the country or a province. In the year 1959, 'Iliad' was selected as a part of this and leenaben taught it. At the end of year, it was staged with more than 100 characters. Everything was designed in the school itself ranging from costumes to Greek ships. The art director was Pal babu and the play director was leenaben herself. A troy city was

created on a giant stage of 150 feet. Pal babu's art design was so real that one could feel like being there in troy by time travel. Devendra was studying in std. 9<sup>th</sup> at that time and he got a role to play in that production. This left a deep mark in his consciousness as a child, which made him read Greek and Roman, Palestine stories in the future and also great characters like Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, Cleopatra, Spartacus, Moses and the film Benhur became his favorites. Jesus Christ too left a deep impact on his thought developing process. He saw movies on this in Ahmadabad later that included the 'Ten Commandments', 'king of the kings', 'Soloman and Sheebah' etc. Years later, when he went to Israel, he visited Bethlehem 'via Dolorasa', the road which was used to take Jesus for crucification. Those who walk on this road, feels compassion and he too felt it. He also visited place in Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. After returning, he wrote a book 'Israel: the land of the Bible.' It was published as a series of articles in 'Gujarat Samachar' and got an award as the best book in 'Tours and Essay' category by the 'Gujarat Sahitya Akadamy' on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1999.

The tragedy Oedipus and queen Elizabeth:

The Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru visited Ahmabad in 1959 when Devendra was studying at shreyas and he used to stay at Ambalal Sarabhai's 'retreat' bungalow whenever he visited Ahmadabad. This time, he visited 'shreyas' and Devenndra was drawing something seating under a tree at that moment. Nehruji took it in his hand and asked 'did you

draw it? It's really good.' Nehruji loved children very much and this inspired Devendra a lot.

Leenaben's younger sister bhartiben too was a good writer who studied world literature. At every new year school opening day at the place 'santhagar' in the campus, she used to give a very inspirational speech, that included the tales of Shakespeare to 'kavivar' Rabindranath Tagore, which left a deep mark on the minds of students.

## **The queen's convoy**

The queen of Britain Elizabeth and her husband duke of Edinburgh visited Ahmadabad those days. The student of 'shreyas' went to shahibaug main road, from where the queen's convoy had to pass. The queen and the duke were in an open car followed by press reporters and photographers. Devendra thought, 'had I been a reporter, I would have been able to cover this and even could see the queen.' Years later, when Devendra Patel revealed this wish, while launching his first book, the famous poet Madhav Ramnuj remarked with a funny comment 'good that he thought of seating in the car that was following the queen and didn't wish to sit besides her in her car....'

A journalist was born in him at a very tender age after completing 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> at Shreyas. He was put at N.H Shah (Sathanmbawala) high school to do S.S.C. The school principal was H.T. Patel, who taught English to Devendra to pre-

pare for the exam. Mr. Shastri taught Sanskrit and Mr. Chhaganbhai Patel taught Gujarati. Devendra was put in a boarding school and he passed S.S.C in 1962 with good marks, reading under the lantern, as there was no electricity in that area those days.

## **St. Xavier's collage**

He got the admission at ST. Xavier's collage Ahmadabad in arts faculty with psychology as his principal subject. The collage principal was father Desouza, who taught English along with father Briganza, pro. Mazumdar taught Gujarati, pro. C.I. Shastri Sanskrit and pro. Bababhai Patel economics. Though Devendra's main subject was psychology, he liked to study English and Sanskrit 'in-depth'. Pro. Shashi was teaching 'Swapnavasavdattam' of poet bhaas and pro. Gautam Patel taught 'kumarsambhavam' of Kalidas. He also studied 'shakuntalam' by kalidas. There is a great influence of all these writings on him. He developed a belief that literature and writing could be a very important field of life and career. First, Homer and than kalidas planted a seed of writing in his subconscious mind even without his knowledge.

During his four year study at St. Xavier's, he had some very good friends whose main subject was English literature. They were Hansraj dabhai, Padmanabh Joshi and Aniruddha Singh Jadeja. They all discussed the work of Shakespeare, ketes, Shelley, Byron etc while at canteen.

His English curriculum at collage included, ‘Hopkins Manuscript’, ‘Uncle Tom’s cabin’, ‘as you like it’ etc.

During these coffee table discussions, one author left a deep impact on him and he was Sophocles, who wrote a masterpiece tragedy ‘Oedipus’. Such tragedy has not been written after this. It shakes the reader from his consciousness. It is a tale of a king, who kills his father without his knowledge, marries his own mother and fathers her children. When he comes to know this gruesome act, he leaves his kingdom and everything in repentance and roams in forest. He even plucks out his eyes with a dagger.

Today, Devendra Patel says.”When I write ‘kabhi-kabhi’, it reminds me of ‘Oedipus’ always. Before 3000 years, man committed such act without his knowledge and today, he commits such acts with full knowledge. The devil in the man is the same after thousands of years, but ancient man was more civilized with powerful and strong consciousness.”. He stayed at st. Xavier’s hostel during those four years to study and the rector was father Valles initially and then father Heredero. Both were Spanish and scholars of world civilization, culture and literature. Devendra was loved by both for his zest for new knowledge. He also studied the life of Jesus Christ. After becoming a journalist, Devendra Patel went to Rome and Italy and stayed at ‘Casa Francesca’ near the famous church of st. Peter’s. Father Desouza was staying there after retiring from college. Devendra Patel wrote a script of documentary films on Rome and other European cities.



Investigative reporting by entering Pakistan:

After completing B.A with psychology at St. Xavier's, he joined M.A at Gujarat University and also started studying law at sir L.A shah Law College in Ahmadabad. During this, he appeared for CIB exam conducted by ministry of home affairs, Central Government, India. Before the results, he accidentally saw an ad. in 'Jansatta', a daily newspaper. It was about taking trainee reporters for a new English newspaper 'western times' in Ahmadabad. He applied for it and the editor of western times, Mr. Ramubhai Patel immediately selected him after a written and oral interview. The news paper was yet not started and they were bringing out only dummy copies. During this, he was introduced to Mr.Chadrakant Upadhyay, a senior reporter of 'Gujarat Samachar', who invited him to Gujarat Samachar. Mr. Jayvadan Patel, a well known writer was the chief reporter at that time. He and Shantibhai Shah, the editor of 'Gujarat Samachar' selected him as a reporter in the very first meeting. He joined there in June 1967. Since then, Shantibhai, Shreyansbhai and Bahubalibhai affectionately played a great role to build a rocketing career of him in the longer term.

## **Gujarat Samachar**

Starting with a routine 'city note' work, he was assigned university reporting. After a short while, the 'Navnirman' agitation was started against the chief minister Chimanbhai Patel

and by his reporting, he proved himself far ahead of other reporters. The student leaders too, used to seek his advice during these days. ‘Gujarat Samachar’ started a supplement ‘lok jeevan na shatdal’ and Jaivadan Patel told him to write for this. He wrote a special report on ‘horse cart’ that was gradually missing from the roads of Ahmadabad. For the depth, simplicity and content in his very first report, he was admired by Jayvadan bhai.

One day, when he was at physical research laboratory and talking to Dr. Rangnathan, the director of PRL, he got alarming information. Recently, there was an earthquake near koyana dam in Maharashtra. Dr. Rangnathan said, “This could happen in Gujarat too, as there is a fault zone beneath the place where Narmada dam is being built. If there is seepage of Narmada water there and if there is pressure after vaporization, it could result an earthquake.”

He filed this story and it was published on the first page of ‘Gujarat Samachar.’ The government had to take it very seriously, as the dam was not built yet and it declared that every treatment will be done to prevent the possibility of this.

Entered Pakistan:

Since then, he never looked back. And wrote several eye opener exclusive news stories. During this, Pakistan attacked India and the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi gave a befitting answer to Pakistan and Indian army captured thousands of kilometers of Pakistan land. Pakistan lost disastourously. The prime minister of Pakistan Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came

to India and pleaded Mrs. Gandhi at Shimla meeting to give Pakistani land back, to which Mrs. Gandhi agreed. 'Gujarat samachar' decided to make a special report on this by sending its reporter to this area, before it is handed over to Pakistan. Shreyansbhai Shah had taken the charge of Gujarat Samachar and this challenging task was assigned to Devendra Patel. He went to Jodhpur with photographer Sanath Zaveri first and met the army headquarters of Indian army there, which refused them to enter the land of Pakistan. Without getting disheartened, they went Barmer to reach Pakistan border. They had to reach Munabav. Here too, they were denied entry by army. Now, an idea struck his mind. Some workers of 'Jansangh' were doing agitation by entering Pakistan every day, not to handover this land to Pakistan. Young Devendra Patel went to Jansangh office and introduced himself and Sanat Zaveri as 'workers from Gujarat and the next day, entered Pakistan in disguise as Jansangh workers. They met the villagers of Pakistan and took some photographs also. The Indian army arrested them and released at Barmer and took away the camera roll of Zaveri with a warning "You shouldn't have done this as we have planted landmines in that area and had you put your foot on that, you would have been blown into pieces."

Devendra and Zaveri knew that the army will take away their camera roll, so they did a trick. The original roll, Devendra hid in his pocket. The army took away the other. After reaching Barmer, the original camera roll and detailed report written with the great courage by Devendra, was sent to Jaipur and from there, it was sent to Ahmadabad by plane. The next morning, Gujarat samachar published a two page special re-

port with photographs and investigative story of Pakistan. The readers of Gujarat lauded this courageous effort.

## **Went to Delhi**

The ‘On field’ reporting style developed during his time. He covered 1982 Asian games by staying 10 days in Delhi. He went to Morbi, risking himself during ‘Machhu dam tragedy’ and did reporting that would shake the hearts. He again went to Delhi to cover some special shots of ‘Gandhi’ film, which were being filmed by Sir Richard Attenborough. He also did the reporting of last rituals of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and then Rajiv Gandhi after their assassination at the gap of 7 years. He went to Delhi and wrote a special report on the plot of Rajiv’s assassination, after a detailed research and investigation.

## **With Mrs. Indira Gandhi**

He did reporting by sitting beside Mrs. Indira Gandhi in her car whenever she came to Gujarat for election campaign and also took her exclusive interviews too. When Rajiv Gandhi was in Ahmadabad once, he visited ‘Gujarat Samachar’ and Devendra Patel talked to him for 45 minutes without taking notes in his diary and then wrote a detail interview. He also toured with the Prime Minister Mr. P.V.Narsimharao to Oman

and took a memorable interview of the prime minister of Muscat – Oman. He also took Morarji Desai's exclusive interview when he was the prime minister. He had a personal rapport with Morarjibhai and they talked for hours. Maniben Patel was also present in this talks many times.

## **Haji Mastan**

Devendra Patel took an exclusive interview of Haji Mastan, the underworld don and a big smuggler of that time. He took his interview in his 'den', having a cup of tea with him. Such was the power and impact of Haji Mastan that bigwigs of Bollywood too used to seek for his blessings.

He also wrote a very interesting story on hidden treasures of Jaipur king at the palace of Jaigarh. He visited the queen Gayatri Devi in Jaipur to write this story. He also interviewed the famous personalities like economist and American ambassador to India pro. Gal Breath, Arther C. Clerk, Dalai Lama, megastar Amitabh Bachchan, singer Kishor Kumar, Mohd. Rafi, actor Raj Kumar etc. He also toured with Atal Bihari Vajpayee to interview him. He interviewed Acharya Kruplani too. He had a very good personal rapport with Gujarat chief minister Hitendra Desai and other chief ministers who were successors to him. Amar Singh Chaudhry offered him the post of information director and Shankar Singh Vaghela offered him the post of the chairman of Gujarat public service commission, but on both occasions, he refused politely. He always stood by the people of Gujarat during any agitation to

voice their issues and problems. He wrote against the injustice by the rulers. He has been very sensitive and fearless by nature.

## **Wohi Raftar**

In 1985, the students of B.J. Medical College started ‘anti-reservation movement’. The Madhav Singh Solanki government wanted to crush this movement aggressively. The police started torturing innocent people by baton charge and firing. Devendra Patel started a column ‘wohi raftar’ against this torture in ‘Gujarat Samachar’ which was the true reflection of people’s mood in Gujarat. It became ‘the voice of Gujarat’ ultimately. This column gave ‘Gujarat Samachar’ a special corner in the hearts of Gujarati people. This made some elements furious and irritated and as a result, they set Gujarat Samachar press on fire ruthlessly. This could not deter the spirit of ‘Gujarat Samachar’ and was started again after 15 days and he wrote, ‘We will write from the ashes of Gujarat samachar’. Madhav Singh government desperately wanted to put Devendrabhai behind the bars and he had to hide himself with his family for 15 days, as some elements were sent out to search him. The Delhi high command had to take a serious note of this and ultimately Madhav Singh was forced to resign as the chief minister of Gujarat. It was a new dawn after a dark night and the readers still remember ‘wohi raftar’ series.

## **Short Stories**

Apart from being a very alert and sensitive journalist, he has been an avid reader of world literature and has written short stories and novels too. His favorite writer is O. Henry, whose story 'The last leaf' left a deep mark on him. 'Dhumketu's 'Post Office' too shook him from his heart by the intensity of it. The depiction of innocent rural characters in Pannalal Patel's 'Malela Jeev' and 'Manvi Ni Bhavai' has been a deep impact on his consciousness. Devendra Patel roamed in the adivasi (tribal) area of Gujarat to study their life and soon it was a literary realization of it in his stories. Kumar Anand inspired him to write his first short story 'Sangath' in the women's magazine 'Shree' of Gujarat Samachar. He then wrote every week for 'Shree' under the title 'Mann Sona Na Tan Rupa Na' and became very popular.

## **Novels**

Shashikantbhai Nanavati, the editor of 'Chitralok' inspired him to write his first novel 'Sajan Re Jhooth Mat Bolo' and

was published in 'Chitralok' which was very successful. Then the novel 'Baby', the story of a teenage girl, was also published in 'Shree'. Such kind of novels were rarely written and it gave Devendra Patel, a new name as a novel writer along with his active journalism. A play was also performed based on psychological short story 'Child Husband' by 'Naphthaya' with 25 shows in Mumbai and Ahmadabad. He was way ahead in the thoughts and the play with controversial subject became popular. 25 years later, Meera Nair's film 'fire' was also based on same topic.

## **Wrote film**

Not limiting himself to only plays, he wrote a comedy film 'Miya Fuski 007' based on Jivram Joshi's famous character. He wrote the story and screenplay and this Gujarati film which was shown in 11 cinema theatres, with houseful boards and went on to be shown for 26 weeks. At that time, there couldn't have been a single child in Gujarat who did not see this film. The great comedian of Hindi film Jonny Walker played the lead role of Miya Fuski, whereas Lily Patel played the role of his biwi (wife). It was directed by the famous director Manhar Raskapoor, lyrics by Avinash Vyas and music by Gaurang Vyas. Despite this big success, he sticks to his first love and passion for journalism. Had he wished, he could have written bollywood films too. Mumbai's A.K. Nadiadwala family was very close to him. Especially, leading producer



Ibrahim and Gaffer Nadiadwala. Amir Khan's father Tahir Hussain too was his good friend.

## **T.V. Serials**

He wrote documentary films and TV serials too, starting with 'America' for leading videographer Vinay Vora. He toured U.K, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium and U.S.A to study and write this script. He visited the famous Hollywood 'Universal Studio' at Los Angeles. This two hour documentary was well received by the audience of Gujarat.

A serial 'Antar Na Ekant' was made from his short stories and 26 episodes were shown on doordarshan much before the advent of hundreds of channels. He wrote the story and dialogues too. A serial 'Dil Chahta Hai' was made for Sab TV based on his stories too. Zee Gujarati channel also selected stories from his column 'kabhi kabhi' and it was a super hit. 'Pardes' was also said to be on the same subject, but Devendra Patel never tried to take the credit.

## **The journey from kabhi kabhi to Chini Cum**

In the earlier days of his career, the newspaper reporting was based on political statements and police press notes chiefly. The labor union president used to give briefing like a dictation to the reporters, like his personal secretaries. They had to go and cover the chief minister speech personally. Devendra Patel gave a new dimension to news reporting by investigative inner stories of political field and politicians. He brought special stories on science through the research of scientists in the newspaper. He wrote his special series on satellite telecast technology 40 years ago, when nobody had thought of it amongst media and common readers.

He gave prominence to human interest news stories with a 'between the lines' message, that would leave a strong impact in to the minds of readers without sounding like a preaching. It was published with the title 'kabhi kabhi' with a literary touch.

The lucidity mingled with sensitivity and sensibility, acted as a thought provoking process against the wrong doings in the society by the 'Powerful' people. He helped a lot for the justice of oppressed women in the society. 'kabhi kabhi' is being published without a break first in 'Gujarat Samachar' and now in 'Sandesh'. Some of the news stories were of such a huge intensity that the Gujarat high court ordered the Gujarat government to act immediately after issuing suo motto.

Take one very important instance. Some hardcore criminals of Dadva village in Bhavnagar gang raped one Nita Goswami,

the young wife of a temple pujari (priest), burnt their house and shop and ultimately forced them to leave the village. The police refused to take their complaint and the couple came to Ahmadabad to commit suicide in the Kankaria lake. Before doing so, they came to Gujarat Samachar and told the whole story to Devendra Patel, who wrote it in such a way, in 'Kabhi Kabhi' that the honorable Gujarat High Court sent a notice to Gujarat government by suo motto. The government had to act and more than 12 culprits were behind bars within 24 hours. Neeta Goswami became the 'Sarpanch' of that village later on.

'Kabhi Kabhi' and Devendra Patel have become a synonym of each other now. His column is one of the top read columns in Gujarati news papers. Many others tried to imitate 'Kabhi Kabhi' but failed miserably. Devendrabhai says, "Difficult writing is simple but simple writing is difficult. You need to have a very sensitive heart, clarity of thoughts, lucid language, knowledge on what people feel and above all a style with little glamour to sustain the interest of the reader. At times you need style of suspense, miracle and a craftsmanship which would act as a thought provoking process."

## **War**

He wrote two books in Gujarati on America's war on Iraq titled 'Gulf War' and 'Saddam Hussain'. It is in-depth analysis of war tactics, international politics, latest weapons and strategies of senior and junior George bush. These two books are different in a class of such genre, written by a journalist.

## **Orator**

Apart from being a good writer, Devendra Patel is a very good orator too, with natural skills. He has given memorable speeches on religion, science, education, politics etc. in many cities of Gujarat, Mumbai, London and USA.

In May 2002, his book release function was held at Wembley, London where the mayor of London Bertha Joseph, Ex. Mayor Lata Patel, British parliament member Priya Kabra, Navnit Dholakia, Barry Gardner and the representative of her highness queen of England Elizabeth too were present. His books have got a place in British parliament library too. He has toured U.K., France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, USA, Holland, Oman, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia etc.

## **Joined ‘Sandesh’**

In December 2007 he joined ‘Sandesh’ as the advisor to the editor and column writer and very soon, became the integral part of ‘Sandesh’ family. He won the love and affection of Falgunbhai Patel, the editor of ‘Sandesh’ and Parthivbhai Patel, the managing director. He has written some remarkable reports since then including the series ‘Mysteries of Modi’ after his sweeping victory in Gujarat. He wrote a funny aprilfool story of Narendra Modi’s marriage with a foreign girl, which the readers read with great sense of humour.

## **Chini Kum**

If ‘kabhi kabhi’ made Gujarati newspaper ‘reader savvy’, ‘chini kum’ the weekly column in Sandesh ignited readers mind. ‘Chini kum’ is a very popular column in Sandesh which reflects the voice and concern of people, which has exposed corrupt politicians, lewd and adulterous ‘saints’, mafias in doctor’s aprons, corrupt officers and white collared ‘thugs’. If ‘kabhi kabhi’ shook people’s hearts from the roots, chini kum is an eye opener towards the wrong doings in the society. It is the ‘Voice of the newspaper.’ He brought Gandhiji, Jawaharlal and Sardar Patel in his imaginary episodes in contemporary sense and also made people laugh with imaginary episodes of interviews with Mr. Narendra Modi.

## **Red Rose**

He also started a new column ‘Red Rose’ in Sunday edition of ‘Sandesh’. It is an in-depth analysis of national and international happenings, which can have a bigger significance, be it China’s secret plan to gulp some parts of India, be it China’s strategic plan to build a port ‘Gadar’ for Pakistan, be it the moves of Fatima Bhutto, be it the dangerous Maoist movement spread around 14 thousand villages of India, be it Gayatri Devi’s billions of rupees property and a legal fight for it or the popularity of the queen of Jordan. He has attracted intellectuals by this column.

## **Mahajati Patidar**

In 2010, 4 to 5 million people from Patidar community had gathered at Unza during goddess umiya festival in north Gujarat. Devendra Patel wrote a series of investigative reports on the origin and progress of Patidar community and published as a book too, that was well received world over.

## **Ahmadabad 600**

He wrote a special series ‘Salaam Shehere Amdavad’ on the occasions of completion of 600 years of historical city Ahmadabad and published as a book too.

## **Awards**

His book 'Israel: the land of the Bible' got the best book award by 'Gujarat State Sahitya Akadamy.'

In 2009, he got the best writer award by the Trans media, Mumbai, for the TV serial 'Kabhi Kabhi' on zee Gujarati.

## **Journalism as a 'Mission to People'**

In every literary form that he has sailed, his mission has been to serve and enlighten the people through his writings. As a journalist, he has made his profession a mission to people and society. He alerted the parents of girls against the fraudulent green card holders who used to cheat the Indian girls after marriage. The series of reports by him applied a break to this. He also helped the women suffering from domestic violence, by his articles.

## **Razia**

The story of Razia, a convent student from Baroda, shook the hearts of the people. A maniac car mechanic was after her for so many days and when razia didn't respond, he threw acid on

her face. She lost her eyes and her beautiful face became very ugly. Devendra Patel with title 'I want vision, not beauty now' wrote an article and a big sympathy wave with anguish erupted in Gujarat. People queued at 'Gujarat Samachar' with money, cheques and drafts to help her, but unfortunately, the damage was so deep that doctors couldn't give her vision back. He also helped thesemia patients and little children with larger heart problems, by his special stories. He also spread awareness against tobacco by real life stories.

## **Nurtured Talents**

He highlighted the services of those who served the society with pure dedication, like Dr. H.L.Trivedi, the director of kidney institute who left Canada and the income of millions of dollars to serve the needy of Gujarat and India. He also gave prominence to theatre artists, painters, architects, teachers, and professors etc. who were left in the corner despite being so talented. He wrote about painter Babulal Soni, mimicry artist Kantilal Patel, former billiards champion Wilson Jones etc. He wrote a special feature on writer Pannalal Patel, the prestigious Gyanpeeth award winner, to introduce him to younger generation.

## **Sardar and Maniben**

Sardar Patel was the first president of Ahmadabad Municipal Corporation, but the people of Ahmadabad, especially the new



generation hardly knew about this and Devendra Patel wrote a special series on Sardar Patel and Ahmadabad to acquaint the new generation of it. He also wrote about Maniben Patel's simple life. Sardar's daughter Maniben kept only two pair of clothes with her. She never married to serve her father. Devendra Patel also wrote about Dr. Jivraj Mehta, who laid the foundation of today's developed Gujarat, during the golden jubilee celebration of the state. He also wrote about the austerity measures of Dhebarbhai, the first chief minister of Saurashtra, to inspire today's politicians and also, he didn't forget to write about Bhaikaka who was a great supporter to Narmada project. He wrote about H.M. Patel, the finance minister of India and also wrote about Gandhiji again and again to inspire the very young generation.

## **For The Students**

He wrote aggressively against the examination system which was only memory based and gave immense stress to students. Every year an alarming number of students committed suicide after the results of board exams of 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. He highlighted the real life stories of world leaders who didn't do well in exams, but succeeded in life, to inspire the students. Some schools displayed his articles on display board.

## **Communal Riots**

He exposed anti social elements fearlessly in his columns 'Kabhi Kabhi' and 'Chini Kum' whenever there were communal riots in Gujarat. He also unearthed the nexus between ruffians and politicians. His writings established communal harmony and peace. During 2002 riots, he went to a relief camp in harsol for minority. People were burnt alive in those riots and there was a fierce communal tension. He helped the affected with relief material. During 1985 riots, stabbing incidences were very high in numbers and he gave a list of ruffians to 'super cop Julio Ribeiro'. Acting on this list, Ribeiro arrested 50 anti social elements in one night who were associated with politicians and peace was re-established from the very next day.

Ribeiro moved in the city in Devendra Patel's car without any security cover, to review the situation.

## **Took Risks**

He has risked his life along with his family many often while exposing the politicians and ruffians. He has always stood by the people in their unrest and injustice fearlessly. There was an attempt to eliminate him along with his family in 1985; when some anti socials attacked 'Patrakar colony' where he lived, but they could not locate his house and they were saved. He also exposed so called saints who lured women in their 'ashrams' for physical advances. This brought awareness among common people. He also came down heavily on some religion sect lady 'gurus' with crores of property

and against whom there were charges to kill their followers who raised voice against the corrupt practices. Ultimately, such 'lady guru' had to move away from Gujarat. In 'Chini Kum', he exposed medical mafias and corporate hospitals that were cheating poor people, police officers who did fake encounters and politicians who were harboring them. At times, looking at the risks, his family has tried to convince him to do away with such news stories, but he has always followed his voice from within. One such instance was when he wrote about painter M.F.Hussain, who drew a nude picture of Hindu goddess Saraswati. He wrote against it in 'Wohi Raftar' in such an aggressive manner that the painter didn't dare to come to Ahmadabad for years.

## **Sea of fans**

He has always remained very polite and 'down to earth' despite having a 'sea of fans' during all five occasions of his book release at Thakorebhai hall. It was an overwhelming response of his readers. The hall was over crowded every time and once eminent writer Chandrakant Bakshi remarked, 'It was an envious scene to see such a huge crowd.'

## **Guiding force to reporters**

He has been a mentor and guiding force to many reporters. Some came to journalism after reading him and some were brought into journalism by him. At times he became a center

of jealousy to some, by his popularity, but he never said a word about such people. Instead, he appreciated good work of those, who worked hard for investigative news stories. Very few have such sense of appreciation in today's world.

## **Rural Development**

He raised rural issues and tried to solve them always. He has a special place for villages in his heart, especially his native Akrund and Sabarkantha district. He did a great work to help people getting drinking water and roads. From Sabarkantha to Kutch, he has helped the needy villagers. Akrund has become like a mini Punjab because of irrigation system. It has small hospital with free treatment for more than 200 patients every day. Still, he hasn't tried to get the credit for these developments.

## **Myth, Mysteries and Facts**

His 40 books have been published in his career of 42 years, by Navbharat Sahitya Mandir. Many often, books worth rupees 50 thousand were sold within half an hour. In this long career in news field, he himself stayed in 'news' sometimes and reports were written for and against him. 'Wohi Raftar' affected politicians and some reports termed him as 'controversial' and criticized him too. It has been a fashion among so called 'ad-

vanced' writers and columnists to lambast Gujarati journalism today, but before doing so, they should read investigative reporting of Devendra Patel who exposed Kalanidhi Maharaj of Dehgam who was the kingpin of adultery and how people got rid of such people by his reporting. He has written several such articles.

To many people, he is a 'myth' and 'mystery'

who really don't know him from within. There have been rumors that he is going to contest the elections every time when there have been elections, but he says' "To write about politics and to be a politician are different ball game all together and being a very sensitive man, I feel myself misfit to be a politician." when criticized by some professional writers and reporters, he replies with funny tone 'Their family members are my readers'. He is known and recognized by his writing style evenif there is no byline to his investigative story. He speaks from heart with deep study, information and logic and those who criticize him feel insecure in their logic in his presence. Still, some have been able to create a myth about him. Says Sameerbhai Seth, the director of 'Sandesh' to him, "Devendrabhai, when you were with Gujarat Samchar, there were so many myths about you that we heard, but when you joined 'Sandesh', we saw a totally different person in you."

In a book release function of him recently, said Parthivbhai Patel, the M.D of 'Sandesh', 'Devendra Bhai is role model to other reporters. It's easy to start a column, but it's really tasking to sustain the popularity. The reason for Devendrabhai's popularity is not only his language and style, but also hard

work and regular study. He writes in such a way that the person for whom he has written, can't decide whether he has been praised or criticized, at times.'

The political advisor to Mrs. Sonia Gandhi; Mr. Ahmed Patel, terms him as 'a man with pure heart' and 'Yaarbaj Dost'. Whereas, the governor of Gujarat, her Excellency Dr. Kamalji Said during his book release function, "Devendra bhai has created the excellence in journalism and he has written fearlessly with courage and without any prejudices." Whereas Devendra bhai said during the function, "it's just a matter of coincidence that I got very poor marks in Gujarati, but people rate me as a successful journalist. If it is true, then I dedicate it to vast reading, simplicity of language and clarity of mind and thoughts. If the writer himself is in dilemma, nobody would understand what he has written. Don't write on topics where you are not good. Do homework, read a lot and try to learn always. One can learn even from peons and ordinary workers too, apart from learned professors. To know what I write, the reader doesn't need to know the intricacy of classic literature. If one finds elements of literature in my writings, it's just a byproduct. It is not eternal what I write but definitely current and contemporary, that is absolutely required today. I read 4-5 hours daily, that include 25- 30 newspapers of the world and I watch 10 new channels for 2 hours daily and keep myself update with national and international news, ranging from barrack Obama to dr. Manmohan Singh, Bipasha Basu and Katrina kaif. 'History', 'National Geographic' and 'Discovery' are my favorite channels. I watch movies on star movies, HBO, MGM and Sony pix. Films

based on Egypt, Rome, Palestine, Greece and Sparta happens to be my favorite. Neither I have a role model nor I want to be like someone else. No writer or reporter is my idol. I want to remain what I am. Osho has said, “Every individual is a unique one and instead of imitating someone else, one must develop his own personality and communication skills.”

Devendrabhai Patel has his own library, which has books on Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Morarji Desai, Bhaikaka, ‘Bhagavadgita, ‘Koran’, ‘Bible’, ‘Godfather’, ‘The Alchemist’, short stories of O.Henry, the mystery stories of pyramids of Egypt, ‘The World Of Farrows’, ‘Ramayana’, ‘ the Mahabharata’, and books on Paigambar Sahab too.

His motto of life is, ‘Read, observe, learn and analyze the information constantly, separate truth from the untruth and then only write. Be polite after success and always stay humble.’ Continues he, ‘Make the best use of your skills.’

These are the ‘Myths’, ‘Mysteries’ and ‘Facts’ of Devendra Patel.

Translation in English

By Dakshesh Pathak

From the original text in Gujarati

By Devendra Patel

