

MY VISIT TO BHADRAN IN GUJARAT (INDIA)

If you are living and settled abroad, no matter what religion you belong to, people always want to visit their motherland. It is like a pilgrimage to go to the village where our fore-fathers were born. It is like visiting a shrine to get the blessings from our forefathers. Although they are not living any more, one feels their spirit is watching us and gives that feel of satisfaction- that they are blessing us. People move abroad and forget their grass roots. However, one should make sure that their children and future generations should carry on this traditions and reminding them that “*we are where we are because of our forefathers*” who were brought up in these small villages. Their teachings and education have given us a sound platform to be prosperous and maintain their religious beliefs, family values and be honest.

I visited my home village- *Bhadran* in *Gujarat (India)* after nearly 11 years. *Gujarat* has moved on since my childhood, the cities are modernised. When I landed in *Vadodara (Baroda)* Airport from *Mumbai*, I realised cities like *Vadodara* and its surrounding areas have undergone massive expansions. Foreign nationals from European countries are managing Hi-Tech industries and Call Centres; they have also managed to taste some delicious *Guajarati* local cuisine and others have even learnt to cook vegetarian food. They have comfortable homes in *Vadodara* and even their children are educated in local schools. They share our cultural values and beliefs. Wedding and social gathering are held in surrounding privately owned farms which are very clean with excellent facilities and very selective hi-class multi-cuisine tasty food. *Gujarat* is becoming a prosperous and vibrant state. Although there might be traffic congestions, the infrastructure has improved significantly and there is less pollution.

Whenever I visit India, I always think of my father's birth place - '*Bhadran*'. This is a small and clean village in *Kheda* District in *Gujarat*. There is a regular bus service and there is *Bhadran* Railway Station. Although, the *Bhadran* railway station is

dilapidated, there is a regular train service to and from *Nadiad* at least once a day. The rail journey goes through small villages surrounding *Bhadran* like *Karamsad* and *Dharmaj* etc. The narrow gauge train and the sound of that little Locomotive took my memories back to 50 years ago when the train used to arrive in *Bhadran* in the midnight and departed the next morning at 4 am. That whistle of the locomotive was like an alarm clock to the villagers who go to work in the fields early in the morning. As we are very used to walking long distances in *England*, the walk from my house in *Nani Khadki* (Khadki are the different sectors of village) in *Sarkarwado* (one of the areas in the village) to the train station was effortless. I still have memories of travelling to neighbouring villages in that train. My grandfather was very conscious about time and to make sure we never missed the departing train, he used to ask 'Nabiji' to bring his *Bullock cart* (called 'Nabiji's Ekka') to carry us and our luggage to the station. *Bhadran* like other surrounding villages is clean with evenly laid paving stones on the entire road through out the village.

The *BadhraKali Mataa Mandir* (Goddess Kali Temple) and *Ranchodji Mandir* (called *Jai Ranchodrai Temple*) was the high light of my visit. Looking at those *Murtees* (Statues of God used for worshipping) brings back some fond memories of that village. The old buildings are still there; people have moved on but the presence of your forefather's spirit is still felt. My Taxi was parked at the bus stop where *Bhadran's mug* (*Moong Dal*) a famous savoury was available, which is also now exported to many countries including *England* for its distinctive flavour. The old *Dharmshala* is now converted into a school. In olden days, the *Dharmshala* and *Bhadran Town hall* was used for the '*Jaan*' (the bridegroom's family, friends and accompanying guests were collectively referred as *Jaan*). In all the Hindu weddings, the *Jaans* were treated with utmost respect, and the bride's father and family would never compromise on the Services offered to these well respected VIPs of the village.

My house in *Sarkarwado* brought me vivid memories of 1958 where my late sister got married. In the fore court of the house, there is a big wooden bench which is over 200 years old and the residents still sit on it in the evenings to gossip. In those days, the photographs taken were in black and white and to make them into colour, the photographer had to water colour them manually- in contrast to today's digital photography. In those days, the weddings used to last for over a week and the preparations were made six months prior to that. In those days during summer and autumn season, there were two or more marriages at the same time in the village and there used to be a competition among the music bands that played *Bollywood* songs. Then, the famous bands were *Darbar band*, *Police band* and *Vijay Band*. To my surprise, I was told in *Vadodara* that the *Vijay band* still exists but with different personalities.

I went inside my house in *Sarkarwado* with very fond memories of my father, my grandfather and my late sister who was married in that house but unfortunately due to the greed of her husband, she died in 1963. I was in Jinja, East Africa when she died in *Bhadran*. The news of her death came to my Father's office by Telegraph – the only mode of communication from abroad in those days. To pay my respect to my late Sister *Jasuben*, I went to the *Smashaan* (crematorium in *Bhadran*). When she was cremated, it was found that she was carrying a baby boy who was only weeks away from being born. This boy would be 36 years of age if he was alive now and my sister would have been 72 years of age- *who knows she would have been playing with her grandchildren now, telling them stories of how good Bhadran was*. It was a very sad memory in life which was due to my greedy brother-in-law who I believe is still alive and remarried. It would not be nice to name him.

Whenever I attend weddings and after the wedding the joyful moment for the bride's father suddenly turns into a very sorrow occasion to see the girl leave his family. It is a very sad moment for bride's parents and family members.

The best part of sharing her life with her parents and being part of her own family is now dependent on her joining husband's family which is a huge adjustment and a challenge for any girl. I always try to avoid that sad moment as it reminds me of my sister. Since my sister's death, my father never took any dowry and discouraged other people to do the same. His teachings and his respect in the society made us to be a very strong family. I am fortunate to have two brothers and one sister, although living far away from each other we are still very close to each other.

When I retire, I have a wish to write a Book about the true and tragic story in my family with emphasis on arranged marriages and sacrifices our parents and family make to ensure that their daughter's marriage is very successful and they are well looked after by her husband and his family members. Who knows if this book is ever written and published, it may end up into a Film based on true story?

From there I made my way to *Badhrakali Mataa Mandir* (Temple) where the ground surrounding the temple is undergoing transformation. I was very keen to help and donate some funds in memory of my sister, parents and forefathers. I was looking forward to donate money to help them in making a *Murtee* (a statue of god). Instead, I met some trustees who were interested in building a huge air conditioned wedding hall which disappointed me and they were not interested in my suggestions. I was told that there are some other small temples being built in the surrounding forecourt area of *Badhrakali Mataa Mandir* but unfortunately they were already paid for the space available. This disappointed me and I left the *Mandir* dissatisfied.

Personal politics and agenda should not take over religious beliefs. I was trying to contribute a small token of appreciation which could be enjoyed by many people residing there. I had some vivid childhood memories where 40 years ago during *Diwali* at 5 am in the morning, I took my grandfather on foot with his hand resting on my shoulder to that *Mandir* for *Badhrakali Mataa's Darshan*. It was one of the

fantastic memories which not many people would have experienced and I will cherish that for the rest of my live.

I then went across the road to *Ranchodrai's Mandir* where the priest told me about the trustees of that temple. I was told that my father had contributed a fixed amount of money in the name of my grandfather, himself and my mother to offer *Prasad* and a meal to mark their death anniversary each year. This tradition of remembering parents and grandparents is carried out from generations to generations by many *Bhadran vaasies*.

My visit to *Bhadran* would have been incomplete if I had not gone to the tower which is in the centre of the village where there are lot of shops where they sell variety of goods. Next to the main tower in the square, there is *Bhaiyaji's* shop. His son *Shambhoobhai* was sitting cross-legged with plates of various *Mithaies* and Savouries which was freshly made. Behind him where he was sitting, on the wall, was his father's Photograph and looking at it, I recognised his father -*Bhaiyaji* after almost 50 years. *Bhaiyaji* came from a very prosperous family in UP and I was told by *Shambhoobhai* (his son) that he had left all his family fortunes to establish his own business independently. He had sacrificed lot of his wealth to come to *Bhadran*. To his surprise, I told *Shambhoobhai* (his son) that his father single handedly cooked various *Mithaies* and all the food for the wedding. He worked very hard for over a week in our house in *Sarkarwado* to prepare those lovely *Mithaies* and food. Huge wooden fired burners (*Chulaas*) were dug in the ground and massive cooking utensils were heated on those burners to cook food. One massive container could prepare a dish which could feed to roughly 300 people and they were called *Big Tapaylaas*.

The stirrers and the sieves used were roughly about 5ft in length and were called *Lambaa* (long), *Jharaas* and *Tabethaa*. Our kind neighbour had allowed us complete access to his house. The *Mithaies* were stored in *leaf Baskets* (*Patraada baskets*) that was kept on the second floor of neighbour's house in a huge room. There was

countless variety of colourful *Mithaies* prepared with excellent ingredients. The only *Mithai* that came from outside was '*Sootheer fenny*' which was specially brought in from '*Khambath*' which is still world renowned among Gujarati communities for its *Kambath's Sootheer Fenny*. I have seen packs of these lovely *Mithai* sold in London shops.

The invitation to come and have a meal which *Bhaiyaji* cooked during the wedding was done by the village Barber's wife by announcing in a loud singing voice in various parts (*Khadkis*) of the village. This was done for both lunch and dinner. People were served with the food that was cooked by *Bhaiyaji* on leaf plates (*Patraada plates*) and the Dal was served in leaf bowls (*Patraada Tokri*). These *Patraada plates* and *Patraada Tokri* were environmentally friendly as they were disposed in the outskirts of the village.

It was a sheer joy and pleasure to have consistent flavour of food from "Master Chef"-*Bhaiyaji* whose techniques and expertise in cooking was passed on from generations to generations. There were no cook books used in those days to look at the recipes. Estimates for quantity of these ingredients were very complicated however, the consistency and the quality of dishes prepared were excellent- this was possible only because of his experience. His son *Shambhoobhai* is now carrying out his father's traditions- What a great Achievement!

Whilst I was standing outside the shop and talking to him, one of his customers came to the shop and requested if he could pay the money for the *Mithai* bought few week ago, later in the month and he replied by saying that "*I have never asked you for any money*". Money was owed without any credit or written note. This gave me a sense of trust in people, value of true friendship, kindness to customers and feeling of togetherness in *Bhadran*.

My visit to Bhadran was only for a few hours; I had completed my mission of visiting the temples, house and quick tour of the village. It is certainly very clean like many surrounding villages and my return journey to Vadodara took me less than half an hour due to the good infrastructure. Half a century ago, the same journey by one of the public transportation took more than four hours via *Annand* and *Borsad* not forgetting having a short break in *Annand* where *Annand's* famous *Dal Bhajia's* (*Annand's Gota*) was a must for a brief stop by a bus. I am sure other six villages neighbouring *Bhadran* such as *Dharmaj*, *Sogitra*, *Waso*, *Karamsad* and *Nadiad* are wonderful and hope people of those villages who have now moved out from there and settled in other parts of India or abroad have some wonderful memories to share. I myself have moved to Sunderland in England to manage two successful Pharmacies with my Wife *Damini*.

A few years ago, I wrote an article about my visit to *Jinja, Uganda*. With kind courtesy of C B. Patel (Editor of Gujarat Samachar) the article was published that brought back memories for many people here and living abroad. These wonderful people were forced to leave *Uganda* in a very short time by the *oppressive regime of Idi Amin*. I hope this short article brings back some fond memories to *Bhadran vaasies*.

UMESH BABUBHAI PATEL

Leema Pharmacy

91-93 Tunstall Road

Sunderland UK

SR2 7Rw

Work Tel: 0191- 5486344

Mobile Tel: +44-07710647756

Email: umeshleema@aol.com