

A Critical Appraisal of Vihang A. Naik's Poetry

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ABSTRACT: Poetry is considered an excellent way of manifestation of our pent up feelings and when such exclusive thoughts descend from the heart of an intellectual poet, these feelings in the form of verse become the most memorable and unforgettable for readers. Particularly, poetry lovers can never forget such ubiquitous and touching lines and readers keep them reserved in their hearts forever. Some poets just jot down something unimposing and unimpressive, some besmirch, some do it just for their reputation but only a few poets write from their hearts and their writing is replete with poetic excellence. Vihang A. Naik is one of those contemporary knots of poets who has achieved remarkable success, much approbation from his readers and has award winning status for his poetic excellence. The exorcism of his poetry paves the way for the readers among the tortuous turns of life. His poetry is a potion for the avid readers who want to learn different lessons from their lives. His poetry works as a loophole in the torrid experiences of life. The love depicted in his poetry is not a puppy love; his love is mature, pure and devoid of egocentricity and self-centredness. Readers find a bubbling experience at the time of perusal of his poetry. His poetry is a critique of many social issues and thus, it gives sound buffeting on the evils prevalent in the Indian society. In this context, present article attempts to offer a critical evaluation of Vihang A. Naik's selected poems from his poetry collections.

KEY-WORDS: Vihang A. Naik, Poetry, Critical Evaluation, Philosophy, Life, Nature, Disasters.

INTRODUCTION:

Indian English Poetry has undergone various phases due to the age of transition and since its beginning many poets have enriched it through their poetry. Several poets have emerged on the literary platform of poetry but a few of them have won laurels due to their intellectual excellence, refined style, exquisite usage of words and the burning issues of the contemporary society. Vihang A. Naik is one of them who has brought out his far-reaching verses in both ambiguous and epithetical style.

Vihang Ashokbhai Naik is a famous bilingual poet who was born in Surat, Gujarat in 1969. He did his schooling from Navrachna School in Vadodara, Gujarat. He has completed his graduation and post-graduation in English from Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. He has read English and philosophy in his graduation that's why he has written very deeply on philosophy. He presently works as an Associate

Professor in the Department of English at Shree Ambaji Arts College, Ambaji. He has achieved great reputation on the basis of his poetry and translation work. He is one of the pioneer contemporary poets and his poetry has post-colonial and postmodernism themes. He has published four books of poetry. His first poetry collection *City Times and Other Poems* (1993) was published from Writers Workshop, Kolkata. *Jeevangeet* (2001) is his collection of Gujarati poems and it was published in the year 2001. His next poetry collection *Making A Poem* was published in 2004 and his fourth poetry collection *Poetry Manifesto: New & Selected Poems* was published in April 2010 from Indialog Publications, New Delhi. Vihang has an excellent way of writing poetry and his choice of words is matchless. Gargi Biswas discerns in her article, "A Dawn of Destruction Reflected in the Poetry of Vihang A. Naik":

His singular method takes the readers into confidence and a personal bond is created as once between the poet and the reader. He has indeed a perfect sense of expression and his style is dictated by the sort of immediacy that he attains with a sober, restrained and dignified tone. (Biswas 6)

Vihang A. Naik is an inborn creative genius and his poetry resembles with many national and international poets who have achieved glory and success due to their poetic creativity. Durga Patva also observes in her article, "As a matter of fact his poems show that he has influenced by William Shakespeare, Michael Drayton, T.S. Eliot, Nissim Ezekiel and Kamla Das." (Patva 456) Sudhir K. Arora compares Vihang to John Keats, "He appears to be Keats in disguise. He makes the reader feel what he feels. But, sometimes, he starts behaving like Shakespeare's Hamlet who remains busy in philosophizing everything." (Arora 86) He is highly influenced by Charles Dickens. (Sarangi 99) Vihang's poetry is the outcome of his natural and spontaneous impulses to write something as he tells in an interview:

I don't know. I don't know why I write poetry....may be the creative urge which would not let you pick up any medium that you are comfortable with....it is not the rhyming scheme that enthrals me about poetry but I think poetry is life which enthrals. (Dhar Interview)

Vihang A. Naik has his own unique and striking style of writing poetry and he has adhered to his unique way of writing in *Poetry Manifesto* also that has made him distinct from the other contemporary poets. There are not only materialistic themes in his poetry; he has gone beyond the physical excess as he tells in an interview:

I have tried to stay away from favouritism. But every mature poet is with one's style, tendency, tone, metaphysics and vision which often get expressed through art or poetry. A poet or an artist would always go

beyond the physical, beyond from that which is seen to express his philosophy or vision. (Dhar Interview)

ANALYSIS

Vihang A. Naik's poetry collection is dedicated to five top Indian poets Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Dom Moraes, Arun Kolatkar and Dilip Chitre. His *Poetry Manifesto* is divided into eleven parts. First part has title "Poems" which has twenty-eight poems and all these poems have been taken from *Making A Poem* (2004). The second part "Are You Looking for That Poet," the third part of the anthology "The Poet as a Young Man," the fourth part "Making a Poem," the fifth part "A Poem Comes Alive," the sixth part "Poet"—from second to sixth—each of these five parts has five poems. Thus, there are twenty-five poems which have been taken from his poetry collection *City Times & Other Poems* (1993). The seventh part has title "Love Song of a Journey Man" and it bears again five poems. The next part "Mirrored Men" has only two poems. Ninth part of this poetry collection "Self Portrait" has only one poem titled "I". The tenth part of the book has title "At the Shore" and it has five poems. The last and eleventh part "City Times" has six poems and in this way the poet Vihang A. Naik has published seventy-two poems in this poetry collection.

To begin with, his first poem "New Website" of this poetry collection tells about the rapid change in the technology and the poet is in search of the third eye which is a symbol of destruction. The poet tells about the changes in the modern era and how people try to find different things on the internet and in the cyber world internet becomes the cause of destruction also. People find beauty on the internet where there is no limit of surfing. Unlimited beauty can be found on internet. This poem tells the unlimited faculties provided by internet in the shift-changing world. He writes:

Beauty is surf.

Surfing beauty.

Here there is

no boundary. ("New Website", p. 11)

This poem is also about the cry of real love in the materialistic world when everybody is extremely busy in one or the other work. The poet tells about the drought of real love in the materialistic age. This poem reminds the readers T.S. Eliots' *The Wasteland*. People are found busy in finding false love on internet and forget or ignore the depth of love which they easily find in their real lives. The poet questions whether a man can find true love only on internet? Can he satiate his bodily hungers only by false means like internet surfing which seem very hollow when one comes on the ground of reality. The poem throws light how modern people live in mirages.

LOVE

Is there a software
for love or a command?

Tell me
can love be

programmed? ("New Website", p. 11)

Vihang A. Naik's second poem "Indian Summer" tells the devastating effects of scorching heat in summer. In summer the land burns due to extreme heat and during the noon, this heat becomes unbearable. The poet uses imagery in this poem. The poem has many meanings in it. Flames of passion also denote the sexual desires of a man in his youth. Here mid-day stands for the youthfulness of a person when sexual urges are at its peak:

The map of India burns
With flames of passions
When fire is set

Against mid-day. ("Indian Summer," p. 13).

He further explains how the heat in summer is the result of rapid industrialization and the cutting of tree due to which heat becomes excruciating and it seems as if the blood and flesh are burning alive. Even buffaloes wallow in the mud and stray dogs also find shelter in the gutter water. The sun seems sitting in the mouth of a dragon who vomits fire. In such awful conditions, people dream of rain for the respite from summer:

Buffaloes rest

On muddy waters, and stray dogs

On leakage from gutters.

...

On the tongue of a dragon

is the boiling sun,

while, locked u, you dream

of rain and thunder. ("Indian Summer," p. 13)

The opening of the poem "Banyan Tree" resembles with the Gieve Patel's poem "On Killing a Tree" in which the Patel writes that killing of the tree is not so easy and a single blow of a knife will not suffice it. Likewise Vihang A. Naik's poem also has almost the same starting:

To unearth the roots

Of a banyan

Is never easy.

Chop or Hack. The old banyan

With the roots spread

Over a century. ("The Banyan Tree" p. 14)

The poet tells that with the change of era and due to blind race of industrialization and advancement in technology, many trees like Banyan Tree have been cut down and the clean water of the river has been polluted by people due to inhabitation and the natural resources are either destructed or polluted. The poem "Summer Hill Devdar" deals with natural beauty of the devdar trees deals with the event of Shimla, 19th June, 2001. The tall and silent trees don't announce the horrific news of the tragedy and the anguish of the victims. Their corpses were buried in the white fog and the devdar trees stand as a witness of their deaths. Vihang A. Naik's next poem "Gujarat" also deals with the earthquake tragedy on 26th January, 2001 that killed many people in Gujarat. The intensity of the earthquake was 7.9 at Richter scale. There were countless deaths on that day.

Countless deaths

in countless eyes

8:48 A.M.

on Gujarat's face of gold

now

only horrific cracks

and

a sense of great loss. ("Gujarat", p.19-20)

Vihang A. Naik becomes deeply grieved and grief-stricken to see the tragic deaths of innumerable people in Gujarat. He tells about the Gujarat earthquake tragedy in details in an interview with Jaydeep Sarangi:

It was my first experience of life. We never did talk of earthquake in a serious way as people do live by it in Japan or other earthquake prone parts of the world. The disaster it created within seconds was immense and horrific. It moved me to first to put down in my mother tongue, Gujarati. The title of the poem is Gujarat with sub title as 26th January, 2001. The national Republic Day turned out to be for us Earthquake day with death toll which, at first, could not be counted. I remember, I was on a journey on the same day from my headquarters, Ambaji to Ahmedabad to my mother's place. And I saw deaths on the same night. (Sarangi 102)

Vihang's poem "Ahmadabad" deals with the dilemma of the poet whether he should follow the fast life of Ahmadabad or she should withdraw himself from that and should become a hermit from the madness of the city. The poet writes:

Should I be
With the flow
Or cease to
Withdraw
Like a tortoise

Become a hermit ("Ahmadabad," p. 21)

The poem "A Character" also deals with the dilemma of the poem who he is. His mind oscillates between who I am and who I am not. The poem "Growing Up" is about the burden of responsibilities when once the childhood is over.

"After your play
of hide and seek, you
grow up. An adult.
Life becomes now
a game lost in seeking.

A meaningless search. ("Growing Up," p. 27).

Vihang A Naik has a natural urge to write poetry and it is just natural to him to write down whatever he finds worth bringing in front of his readers. He loves writing poetry and he calls it a complex process in an interview with Nabanita Dhar, "To me writing poetry is like love being in love. In love ... here personal style and tendencies matter which makes the work of art individualistic... It is a complex process though apparently it may seem to be too simple. It can be spontaneous as well with some poetic words or verse. (Dhar Interview). He calls poetry an unexpected and silly thing. He calls it a dream and an art:

Yes, a poetry must be
An expected thing; perhaps silly.
A nightmare or a dream.
A craft, a paper art. ("Poetry Manifesto," p. 42)

The poet is influenced by the Indian philosophy and he has studied it in his graduation and applies it on his poetry. He seems to be greatly inspired by the Indian philosophy and his poetry collection deals with various themes. According to the poet:

At the corner of the desk
Life is a philosophy
Book with pencil marks
Wounds and comments. A poem
You cancelled at the end" ("A Matter of Life," p. 61).

This poet seems at the loss of his real self and sometimes feels selfless and meaningless. He wants to know about his own self in his poem "I". Thus, the poet loses interest in the materialistic world and wants to know about his purpose of coming in this world so that he may do accordingly:

I
wake up
to see my
Self
discovered beyond thought ("I," p. 97-98)

Vihang A. Naik's Poetry is replete with the sensual imagery also. His poems deal with the sensual pleasure and his poetry does not have the

imagery, metaphors, personifications only; his poetry has a picturesque quality also. He writes in his poem "pleasure":

the serpent
taking the garment
out
displaying the skin
of beauty

...

lost in the circles of pleasure
until the wind
shook the design

on the sand pleasure. "(Pleasure," p. 102)

Naik's poetry has many themes and his poetry germinates the seeds of dismay, disappointment and sorrow due to natural disasters and the tragedies of life but there is still a tinge of optimism in his poetry that motivates and inspires people. The world is full of tragedies and we live very small fraction of life in happiness but those moments should be fully enjoyed. Sometimes, time does not provide opportunities to us. Vihang A. Naik discusses such pathetic conditions also in his poetry. His poetry is terse and weighty. His poem "At the Shore" has only three lines and it is written in an epithetical style. It deals with the untimely martyrdoms of those soldiers who go to heavenly abode without fulfilling their worldly desires and leave many responsibilities unfulfilled and thus, create an irreparable and irrevocable loss for the members of their families:

Songs without words
of some
sailor lost (At the Shore, p.105)

Vihang A. Naik's poetry deals with many figures of speech and literary devices such as alliteration, assonance, metaphors, similes, personifications, hyperboles, imagery, synecdoche etc. His poetry is written in free style writing where there is no any boundation of rhyme scheme but the torrent of his poetry is very influential and remarkable. He has dealt with his personal conflicts, social problems, human weakness, natural calamities, love, lust, materialistic pursuits, socio-political and religious issues. He follows Nissim Ezekiel's

style and he uses Indian English however there is no use of pidgin English in his poetry. He has taken some characters from the mythological epics also such as Vishwamitra, Draupadi etc. which add glory to his poetry.

CONCLUSION

After going through Vihang A. Naik's *Poetry Manifesto*, it can be concluded that Vihang Ashokkumar Naik hits upon burning issues of all times and it makes his poetry unparalleled, unique and exquisite and thus, he excels many other contemporary poets. Professor Vihang is an a very renowned poet from Gujarat and if he can be elevated to the level of John Keats, William Wordsworth, Nissim Ezekiel, Robert Frost, A.K. Ramanujan, Arun Kolatkar there will be no exaggeration in this statement. His poetry deals with so many significant themes and embarkation of such themes can be done with only intellectually-gifted and versatile poets and Vihang A. Naik, in fact, is not an exception. He deals with those themes which deserve mention in his poetry. His poetry is enriched with the intellectual maturity, philosophical view, aesthetical exquisiteness, critical insights, inspirational words and motivational zeal despite the galls of life which torment us and his poetry provides a cooling respite from the traumatic and torrid experiences of life which are indistinguishable part of life. His unique craft of writing, intellectual aptitude, touching themes and impressive language has made him an international figure. Dr. Kalyani Dixit writes about his latest book, "Vihang A. Naik's *Poetry Manifesto* unfurls the roll of a tinted fabric of his candid sensibility which displays the multicoloured impression of a huge range of his experiences." (Dixit 1) In the article "Psychoanalytic Study of Vihang A. Naik's *Poetry Manifesto* (New and Selected Poems)" Gargi Biswas also applauds Vihang's *Poetry Manifesto* in the following words:

"The collection of poems in the form of book is an outstanding piece for raising

social issues related to life, touching the hearts of people. It is a collection of thoughtful and philosophical poems which shows in a creative manner carrying the desired message with confidence and full maturity of speech. (Biswas 22)

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