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Life of a city in all its shades: An analysis of Vihang A. Naik's Poetry

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Abstract

Vihang A. Naik's Poetic collection Poetry Manifesto is a seminal work in modern Indian poetry in English. In his poetry Vihang A. Naik shows his utter disgust for city life, and urban angst is very conspicuous element in his poetry. He seems to be disillusioned with city life and finds solace in the emotional sensibility of the heart which celebrates love as an indistinguishable part of human life. Philosophically his dormant urban angst generally finds a very vehement expression in his alter ego. This paper explores the underlying anger and disgust towards urban life in Vihang A Naik's Poetry Manifesto.

Keywords- Disgust, Conspicuous, Disillusioned, Urban, *alter ego*.

Vihang Ashokbhai Naik was born in Surat, Gujarat on September 2, 1969. He had his primary schooling from Navrachna School in Baroda, Gujarat. He is India's contemporary poet writing in English. His poems have appeared in many literary journals and anthologies along with some very significant e-publications. Four collections of his poetry have been published: *Poetry Manifesto: New & Selected Poems, Making A Poem, City Times and Other Poems*. He is educated from The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda with English Literature, Indian Literature in English Translation and Philosophy.

His poems exhibit a clear influence of William Shakespeare, Michael Drayton, T.S. Eliot, Nissim Ezekiel, P. Lal, and Kamla Das. He is now well-known and familiar and established name in area of Indian English Poetry. He is also known as a progressive poet.



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Vihang A. Naik's *Poetry Manifesto* is a seminal literary work which displays the multicolored impression of a huge range of his experiences. The Book is divided in eleven segments entitled as: Poems, Are You Looking for that Poet ?, The Poet as a Young Man, Making a Poem, A Poem Comes Alive, Poet, Love Song of A Journey Man, Mirrored Men, Self Portrait, At the Shore and City Times respectively.

Poetry Manifesto is one of the brilliant poetry collections in the history of Modern Indian English Poetry. The poems in this collection are vintage. Vihang Naik's poems are intuitive, thoughtful, philosophical and creative pieces, where the poet displays a confident command, mature, with a fine balance of emotional intensity, irony, ranging across themes and places with experimentation. (Dr Vishwanath Bite 4)

As per The blurb; 'The poems in this collection are vintage. Vihang A. Naik's poems are intuitive, thoughtful, philosophical and creative pieces.'

The poetry collection is based on many themes like religious, social, cultural, and political and economic and personal history. The first half of the book is devoted to concepts such as versification, poetic language, and tradition, the second half is organized along genre lines and examines, nature poetry, sociological experience. All poetry appears in the creative followed by literal translations. This book is considered to give readers with even smallest information of the English language and appreciation of the brightness of Indian poetry. Many poems in the collection are written in free verse. It will be a precious collection of poems for students and teachers alike. (Dr Jitendra Aroli 248)

His poetry depicts a confluence of his consciousness taking an alien stance in the deceptively familiar world. He remains in stark solitude, commenting, observing, and pondering upon the bursting sensibilities of humbug that can hardly yield any concrete substance of life. Though his curious mind oscillates between the glorious past and unborn future, he posits himself as the



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representative of modern decay. Live lustre of common things persists in his dreams, too, when he employs several tropes to convey his message in a unique way. We are airy nothing and as such our existence has little value. Vihang A Naik displays city life in various ways in Poetry Manifesto. His poetry reflects his intense anxiety and disgust for city life which causes him sometimes to be an alien in the familiar world around him. He ceaselessly whets his conscious mind for the inner consolation of the self by employing Indian mythology and the topics of burning issues. Against the oddities of city life he has to rely on the emotional sensibility of the heart (herzlekhayt) celebrating love as an indistinguishable part of human life. Modern man has become perfidious; he has more sinned against than sinning. And a sin or crime needs punishment. Though man's progress is measured in the form of roads or highways yet he stands on the steep side of miserable environmental regress. The growth of physical beauty appears to be in ugly contrast with natural and spiritual beauty. A certain kind of vein of Eco-criticism pervades through this poem. Preservation of natural heritage is connoted and meditated with a cry of despair. This urban angst he feels and records with the utmost dissent. With urban settings, he transforms the cherished ideals into postmodern world with which his fellow Indians could empathize. And with the incantation of his versed art, he portrays the particular to represent the universal so that his poetry-lovers could be content to survive with love, dignity, values, and humanity. He provides a vision to speculate over multiple triumphs, anguishes, complexes, hopes and dreams of a layman.

In an interview conducted by me with Vihang A. Naik, he described his process of writing poetry, on how he observes certain things and events and those things and events remain in his mind and he reflects over them, jots them down after a thorough and deep study of the particular phenomenon, and poetry for him is a craft which involves a very hard labor on the part of creator (in his case poetry) rather than being a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. As such his poetic oeuvre is not only imbued with brimful of humane subjects but also socio-cultural spectrum



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in the continuum of spiky existence. Vihang's poetry offers us, at its best, the sanity and significance of modern urban living. Vihang Naik's poetry reflects an urban angst that endeavours to eradicate the banal non-poeticity of modern psyche. Craving for heightened moral responsibility and urban sobriety, his emotions appear to have endowed with hackneyed ambits that seek and pop-up with sombre philosophy towards modern tech-man. Vihang's poems mostly comprise autobiographic elements which emanate from his soul with a subtle philosophical and mystical trait. Most of his poems end with a sense of futility, a void, or uncertainty. Nevertheless, he embarks on the sunny sides of several topics under his inspection, churns over it again, shows his favor or distaste, and infers it with the bevy of crisp comment or a punch on the maladies of man-made malignity. The glory of city has withered. This loss he commemorates with a grave rupture in his heart.

His short lines attract with images and phrases that speak themselves to the reader. 'All the poems of this collection are specimen of his unparalleled poetic adroitness (Dixit, 2013).

His peculiar style of composition, terse as it is always there, imparts a message of being and becoming a wise man in a humane way in perhaps inhuman world around us.

Vihang A Naik displays city life in various ways in Poetry Manifesto. In '*The Bunyan City*' he personifies the city and defines it as

This aged city,
facing the withered glory,
now wrinkled, cracked,
weather – beaten
with dim eyes.....

In this poem he expresses social ingratitude with a pang banging against the callous side of sophisticated society.



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A river turns

into a gutter. There is humming

of vehicles. The city mumbles

You grapple for meaning

in the traffic of noises.

The old Bunyan

is no more...

The roots won't die.

You witness the rebirth

in the mould of stone

Deterioration and loss of physical beauty of trees and rivers make him yell aloud as he notices the ugly development in the guise of highways or stony sculpture. These are piquant sentiments of the poet that prompts the common, layman for the preservation of our natural heritage. *In an interview conducted by me with Vihang A. Naik he told that development in the name of concrete buildings is certainly leading to spiritual decay and he has incorporated his viewpoint in most of the poems analyzed in this paper.*

In Prayer he wants to rescue “at once” from the absurdity of city life:

this

absurd city



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City within
a city
cities leading
you nowhere
rescue us
Lord
at once
show us
some

purpose
or

meaning

And he is prompted to accrue a modicum of sanity to proffer life a real purpose, significance and meaning. Vihang is obsessed with creative process of writing (or making poems) in an ambience of baffling problems of our existing society.

The poem on Indian summer tells the fate of Indian cities, how the city atmosphere is getting polluted day by day has been nicely represented in these verses.

...From the engines and smoke pipes

...The smell lingers

Of flesh and blood



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Burning alive

On muddy waters, stray dogs

On leakage from gutters

Summer shadow move

And float upon bakes soil

A poetry critic, Sudhir K. Arora very aptly writes: ‘from the technical aspects, the poet in Vihang Naik seems to be rich enough to create interest in the reader who enjoys the music as well as ponders over the thought expression (Arora, 2010).

To conclude it can be said that the poems of the book provides readers a mirror to look into life of a city in all its shades, and it is common to find some expression of glory and misery that people feel in his City. The poems are clear expression of the imagination and feelings of the poet in the form of free style of poetry which appears to be simple but has a very deep inherent poetic meaning.



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