

# Poetry of Vihang A. Naik: A Study of Poetic Creation and Theme of Multi-Aspects of Contemporary Life

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**Abstract:** Dr. Vihang Ashok kumar Naik's personality has adored with two best titles one is 'bilingual poet' who has written poems in Gujrati and English languages and other is the best translators who has translated Gujrati poems into English. His poetic expression has found place in his four major works namely; *Poetry Manifesto: New and Selected Poems* (2010), *Making A Poem* (2004), *City Times And Other Poems* (1993). And his Gujrati work is *jeevangeet* (2001). All these collections are fine compendium of his profound ideas, expressed by him philosophically and ironically. In his *making a Poem* he described his concept of poetry and the process of making poetry and a poet's relation with his poem. *Poetry Manifesto: New And Selected Poems* (2010) shows that he has highly influenced by Indian philosophy. Poems in this book imbued with religious, social, economic, political and sometimes with personal themes. So a theme of multi-aspects of life can be seen in his poetry. The aim of present paper is to focus on Naik's notions about poet and poetry making. An attempt also will be made to highlight different themes adopted by him in his poetry. The poetic sensibility he has got is the demand of modern kaleidoscopic society in India.

**Keywords:** Vihang A. Naik, poetic sensibility, poetic creation, making a poem, the poet, Indian philosophy, poetry manifesto, Multi-coloured theme, humanistic approach, free verse.

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Vihang A. Naik is an eminent poet of Indian writing in English and his reputation as a good teacher and a translator remains unchallenged. This great poet was born in Surat, Gujrat on September 2, 1969. He got his early education from Navrachna School in Varodara, Gujrat. He has completed his B.A. in English and Philosophy in 1993. He has done his M.A. in English literature and Indian literature in translation in the year 1995 from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. He has also worked as a teacher in UGC recognised colleges with Hemchandracharya North Gujrat University. Since July 28, 1997 to present time he is working as an associate professor in Shree Ambaji Arts College in Gujrat. His poetic career came into vogue with the publication of some of his poems gradually in some literary journals, anthologies and e-publications and which won him awards. Now he is India's well known poet of modern age who is cordially devoted to Indian literature. He has won Michael Madhusudan prize for poetry in 1998.

He is one of those poets whose poetic power draws the realistic picture of society including its multiple perspectives. It seems that he took so many themes (from basic to hi-fi) to mend the society by spreading the light of true knowledge through his poems. He is a bilingual poet who has tried his hand to write poems in both languages in Gujrati and in English. His writing style which is free from all shackles and the different themes taken by him in his poems distinguished him from other poets of Indian writing in English. He took the task of translation and translated Gujarati poetry into English not only his own Gujarati poems but of others also. Naik's power of translation is like the poetic sensibility of Dr. Bina Biswas who had translated many of Tagore's poems into English language.

There are some significant journals in which his poems have published they are: *Indian literature :A sahityaakademi Bi-Monthly journal*, *Kavya Bharti*, *POESIS :A Journal of poetry Circle*, Mumbai, *The Journal of Poetry Society*(India), *The Journal Indian Writing In English*, *The Journal of Literature and Aesthetic*, *The Brown Critic*, *The Poetry Chain*. There

are his four great works that gained him popularity and fame, among them three are in English and one is in Gujarati. His English works are: *Poetry Manifesto: New And Selected Poems* (2010), *Making A Poem* (2004), *City Times And Other Poems* (1993). And his Gujarati work *isjeevangeet* (2001).

His first poetic collection including *city Times and Other poems* published by writers workshop (India) in 1993. Another collection *making A Poem* published by Allied Publisher (Mumbai) in 2004. His *Poetry Manifesto (New & selected Poems)* published by indialog Publications Pvt.Ltd (New Delhi) in 2010. The memorable collection of his Gujarati poems, *Jeevangeet* which is dedicated to the victims who suffered during the sudden incident of Earthquake in Gujrat on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2001, published by Navbharat sahitya mandir (Ahmedabad).

According to *The Journal of Poetry Society*: “one of the pleasure gained by reading Vihang A. Naik’s poetry is the awareness that every poem both single and when placed together as a body of work demonstrates a belief in the possibilities language might have to truthfully and energetically communicate the writing experience.” In his poetry there is a reflection of the great Indian characteristic-‘variety and unity of India’. India is a country and the people, live here belong to different communities like Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jew, parsi and Christian, all have different tradition, religions and languages. But India is united having all diversity. In the same way all the aspects of contemporary Indian life aesthetically and thematically placed in Naik’s poetic collections. Vihang A. Naik’s concept of making poetry found place in his *Making a Poem*. Through this collection he has expressed his ideas about a poet, a poem and the relationship between the poet and the poem and theory of poetic creation.

William Wordsworth defined “Poetry” as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling. It takes its origin from the emotion recollected in tranquillity.” According to P. B. Shelley, “Poetry should come to the heart of the poet as natural as leaves to the plants.” But Naik’s theory of poetry is significantly different from that of others theory of poetic creation. In his interview with Issahitya talking to Nabanita Dhar he expresses his ideas about the creation of poetry, “It is poetic experience that matters with the faculty of intuition” and “Poetry can be captured in any art depends upon the artist how one captured it and to what extent that aesthetic experience in any medium.” About his art of making poetry he says,

In his *Making a Poem* his focus is on Initially the poetry leads you, as far as my intuitive experience is concerned because I believe poetry writing is subjective art. I would like to express from my point of view.... There is hard labour. Reworking. Behind every oeuvre there is nothing like miracle but hard labour. At time it may appear spontaneous but it would never be without artistic efforts only little 5% would be genius.... A concrete poetry may differ from rhymed couplets and free verse. (Interview)

In his *Making a Poem* his focus is on the poet’s personal aesthetics and his writing process. It is a collection of twenty five poems divided into five sections: ‘Are You Looking for that Poet’, ‘the Poet as a young Man’, ‘Making a Poem’, ‘A Poem Comes Alive’ and ‘A Poet’. Each section has five poems. Here Naik’s focus is on the relationship between the poet and the poem. He says that new gentleman has a desire for tune. He symbolically emphasises that poet rhymes about human being in woman and man because birth and death is inevitable in life. As he writes in “Woman and Man”; “A poet rhymes the woman / and the man. You / cannot make a poem / that would vanish in the night.” (Poetry: Manifesto 45) Poetry is the fusion of thought and feeling for him. About the rhyming scheme he says in his interview that:

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. ( Interview)

His imagination of the process of making poetry symbolically described in “At Seventeen” he writes: “you have lost your / su’arg. Discover the nark / within yourself. At thirsty / you practice / moksha making a poem.” Talking about the creation of poetry he also focuses on the harsh realities of modern era pertaining to the endless journey of life. In his “Making A Poem” he presents his poetic process in terms of life, “To write a poem the pen/ has to slide making a line/ over a sheet. You see a/ smoke uncoil. Words here”. Poems like “A Poem Comes Alive”, “The Pen”, “Aquarium”, “A Poem”, “Winter Pen” are the beautiful source of his poetic process. His genuine compassion for poetic process can also be seen in his poems entitled: “Wanted”, “Making of a Poet”, “In Rains”, “The Absent Poem”, “A Poem.” The picturesque description of his personal feeling and strong emotion throws light on the creative writing or poetic process as in “Making of A Poet” he writes:

Sometimes you feel the urge to fly  
 With birds against the sun  
 A wish to walk down the streets  
 F a city as a stranger  
 A desire to be alone amid the crowd  
 Be lost in the flow  
 Listen to rains or jungle drum beats  
 Howl with wolves or talk to walls  
 Did you instruct your hand to move  
 Or make a poem?  
 Then you may even wonder how poetry ( Kavya Bharti 100)

He has great command on poetic form so that he can observe any sphere of life and depict them with reality. "HOW ABOUT making a poem within a poem? / You smell the ocean and / the sand. / a life within a poem" wrote Vihang A. Naik ( Bhattacharjee) about the process of making poetry. Even in his interview he says,

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. (Interview)

He writes about the relationship between a poet and a poem in 'A Poet': "In metropolis / a poet / hunting / a butterfly / ends up / with a pen / a blotted image / a poem."

Patricia Prime's opinion about *Making A Poem* has expressed in 'the *Journal of the Poetry*: "Making a Poem, is therefore, an intriguing work to appear at a time when what could be called a revival of poetry writing is taking place." Poems included in this collection are the best instance of his good command on the poetic form through which he became successful to depict his true ideas and observation towards life. However, she also praises Naik "for not distracting himself with enquiries into problems of subjectivity and textuality, somewhat puzzling in a field of literature where subjectivity and textuality are of paramount importance". In 'A Poem Comes Alive,' Naik describes the way in which a poem infuses life into words: "The / Ink / Blots / Image / After image / Where / A poem / Infects life / in the rib of words." So the process of poetic creation, according to him, is not always something spontaneous but it takes hard labour to its creation or its being into existence.

As far as the concern of the theme of his poetry "It is life" he himself expresses his ideas about the theme of his poetry in his interview by saying that;

Initially it was life. Then it was city life man woman relationship. Human nature. Themes are often in flux. I have experimenting on the process of creative writing itself as the theme. Poetry about the act of poetry writing or may be no theme at all...here 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. (Interview)

No poet can remain untouched with the impact of the age in which he is living and the same is with the case of Naik because he is an independent poet belongs to the age of new poetry. The age of new poetry is in the words of Prof. Satish Kumar

The new poetry is remarkable for fecundity, experimentation and the vivid presentation of contemporary reality and situation. The traumatic political situation which resulted in the partition of the country, the disintegration of village community, and problem of cultural, economic and political values attracted the attention of writers and poets during the period.

This definition aptly suits to Naik's poetry. *Poetry Manifesto* is the fine compendium of his thoughtful, philosophical, intuitive and creative pieces in which "Naik ponders a theme of mature confident command with a fine balance of emotional intensity, irony, ranging across theme and places with experimentation." (fb. Vihang A. Naik's timeline) After

reading his *Poetry Manifesto* Bhaskaranand Jha Bhaskar, a trilingual poet and also renowned reviewer and critic calls him “a conscious poet of ecological awareness” because he finds *Poetry Manifesto*, “a manifestation of his poetic creed, his creative vision and beauty, intensity of strong emotion of life, sense of realism, eco-socio-political concerns and existential dilemma.” *Indian Book Chronicle* praised him by saying; “the [Vihang A. Naik] poet has something up his sleeve to say beyond the appearance.” A true poet can describe the true merit of a poet so did Bhaskaranand Jha Bhaskar when he writes in the praise of Naik’s poetry, in an article, “endowed with a broader poetic vision the poet prefers his poetry to be VIBGYOR and that is what forms the manifesto of true poetry. In fact VIBGYOR is the acronym of all the seven colors of rainbow” aesthetically he further writes, “It contains the symbolic meaning representing different mood of human life.” no doubt that Naik has gifted with this quality. The impact of the age has clearly seen on his poetry. Vihang A. Naik throws light on the life of a very large city in all its aspects, glory and misery in *City Times and Other Poems*.

*Poetry Manifesto*, no doubts, is an anthology of his intuitive and philosophical poems. Themes of social amalgamation, indian philosophy (Moksha and Moha), sudden natural disaster, agony and meaningless purpose of morden men all has compactly woven in these poems. Dr. Jitendra Aroliia aesthetically summarizes this collection by writing in his paper, “Kaleidoscopic Vision In the Vihang Naik’s Poetry: Manifesto”

The poetic collection is based on many themes like religious social, cultural, 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 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 English language and appreciations of the brightness of Indian poetry. Many poems in this collection are written in free verse. It will be precious collection of poems for students and teachers alike.

There is no want of figures of speech in his poetry like metaphor, personification and imagery which helps him to portray the multi coloured theme of the society through his poetry. What distinguishes Naik from other poet is his style about which Dr. Kalyani Dixit has mentioned in her paper:

Strikingly imagery, captivating metaphors and subtle use of other figures of speech add a fresh glory and grace to his poems. In ‘Indian Summer’ he weaves following image to portray the picture of scorching heat: Look out/ Through the iron grills / on the tongue of a dragon / is the boiling sun, / while looked up, you dream / of rain and thunder.

In his “The Poet As A Young Man” his focus is on the educational system that weighs the knowledge on the basis of degree: “credited with certificates/ if education makes / Man to look at him self.” The theme of Indian philosophy ( moksha, moha and sensuousness) reflects in his poems in the poem. ‘A Song Of Menka’:

Now I feel I shall find my moksha  
Through the flesh of your glazing body.  
Your body is all I have in embrace.  
A river penetrates the churning ocean.  
Meditation entes deeper layers of oneness,  
The dance of the universe on the ball point.  
Of desire a song for Menka searching words  
Eyes, lips, breast, things throbs with sensuous.”(33)

His inclination to Indian philosophy appeared in some poems like: “Prayer”, “A Reader’s Response”, “A Poem and Questions”, “At Seventeen”, “A Matter of Life”, “Questions”, “A Poet” etc. He has scattered the theme of indian philosophy in his poetry by using the words like: moho, maya, mukti, moksha, Odhni, Ghazal. His characters like: Draupadi, Vishwamitra, Menka are the reminder of great Indian Epics- Mahabharata and Ramayana. As he writes:

Fingertips have eyes exploring,  
Eyes become fingertips, unseen.  
Body is Moha, desired Maya, admired  
Even Vishwamitra wouldn’t deny the view.(33)

Another important theme pertaining to his poetry is city life. He describes all multi-coloured shades of a city in his poetry. His poem 'Indian Summer' deals with the theme of Indian philosophy and describes all about the mis-happenings or events of Indian society: Map of India burns / With flames of passion / When fire is set / Against mid-day. You search / The city, lost / In a mirage. The sun fumes / There is only heat and dust. (13) In "Indian Summer" there is a search for city while in "The Banyan City" a city has personified with the aged city: "aged city / facing the withered glory / now wrinkled cracked / weather-beaten / with dim eyes." In "Prayer" cities are called absurd: 'this / absurd city / city within / a city.' In poem, "Ambaji", he gives description of his place. His love for environment reflects in the poems like: "Summer Hill Devadars" and "The Banyan City" in which he describe the importance of trees.

He uses irony to depict the pathetic condition of modern man in his poem, "Failure", what a piss / of work is man / stuffed with NONSENCE / you have EYES / CANNOT see / you can TOUCH / CANNOT feel / your VICTORY / is PAPERBALL / in DUSTBIN." (Dixit) and the theme of nothingness is described in the poem 'Night': "it is night / the candle flames burns / melting a body / after a flickers / and melting wax a dark / void remains. There are two poems, "The Song of Maneka" and "A Song for Maneka" (Dixit) in which he has tried to show the sensuousness of human nature. He makes it clear in his writing that anybody's status in the society changes the meaning of life. Life is a dream, game, comedy, and tragedy for wise, fool, rich, and poor respectively.

"The End of An Affair" is the representation of his ideas related to social reform:

My heart served in a clean plate  
I know that life of a poet  
Could be cut into two with fork and spoon  
After oue affair she discovered life  
Is a tale of prose. I felt love as short as haiku.  
A time to part. Let us kiss and depart. (Making a Poem 31)

Modern men's life is the life of earning and spending in which he tries to do something new or creative:

Yes a poetry must be  
An unexpected thing; perhaps silly.  
A nightmare or a dream.  
A craft, a paper art  
Why bother for something more  
The why the how  
And the what of poetry  
May it be black and white or bloody.(Poetry Manifesto 42)

In his poem he describe the real nature of human being that man is not sad due to his own sorrow but the source of his sadness is other's happiness. In poem, "Desire" he has artistically used the metaphor of octopus, a sea animal to describe desire. He, in this poem, perhaps wants to say that just as octopus has 8 legs and if it catches a prey, he tears him very badly in the same way if someone is caught by some desires they become the cause of his ruin. The theme of love and compassion also described in the following lines of the poem: "Desire" through the metaphor Octopus: "the octopus / of desire / stirs / arteries and veins / tears flesh apart / feeding upon fire / swallowing air".(101) He expresses his theme of realization of life after innocence and optimism in the poem "After Innocence": "you find yourself / strange in the fog / of knowledge / enter the world".(111)in this poem the poet also discusses various stages and changes which takes place in whole of his life man from childhood to manhood.

"Love Song of a Journey Man" has five poems, each crafted beautifully with philosophical blend of harsh realities of life with being symbolic in tone. "Love Song of a Journey Man", "you upholding / down / ward / look / Dimpled shyness, / warmer breath. / Transparent eyes. / Flickering flames. / ankle play / I'd then begun / to hear wing / in empty spaces. / A song / in the desert / of my heart. / A first journey." This also shows the philosophical attitude of the poet reflected metaphorically and symbolically. According to Dr.Ratan Bhattacharjee,



The picturesque imagery used by Naik in some of his poems, is quite captivating : “the sharp sunrise / in your eyes / yawns / to see vultures / mounted high / not too far / from the grab / of your eyes / scanning skies”. In love poetry Naik excels with proverbial precision: “You know me. / I know you. / Love”. The poet felt in a different way about the transitoriness of love which is beautifully described: “ I felt love as short as haiku. / A time to part. Let us kiss and depart”. Just excellent as poetic expression.

He further remarks,

... A Fairy Tale quality permeates in some of his poems ‘A Play’, ‘A Story’ and ‘The Poet as a Young Man’. But the same man could be writing such lines in the description of Desire :” Tears flesh apart! / feeding upon the fire/swallowing air”. The abstract Desire in a human mind is never made so tangible and concrete in any other Gujarati poet. He could do this in many poems with an ease that comes to a great poet. "I don't know why I write, and why poetry in particular' wrote he, but his poems already gave us the answer.

Naik’s deep love and passion for poetry can be seen in his poems like, “Poetry Manifesto”, “Women and Man”, “A Reader’s Response”, and “A Poem and Questions.” There are few poems : “A Disturbed Sleep”, “Are You Looking for That Poet”, “At Seventeen”, “A Poem Profiles”, “The Poet as a Young Man”, “A Matter of Life”, “Making a Poem”, “A Poem”, “Winter Pen”, “A Poem Comes Alive”, “Msaking of a Poet”, and “The Absent Poem” which focus on his attitude, language and importance of poetry. “A Stage”, “Hero”, “Growing Up”, “Infertility”, “Aporia”, “A Play”, “The Pen” and “Wanted.” Come under the category of symbolic poems. As a matter of fact his poems show that he has influenced by William Shakespeare, Michael Drayton, T.S. Eliot, Nissin Ezekiel and Kamla Das. Perhaps it is Naik’s apt use of striking imagery and captivating metaphors seeing which Bhaskaranand Jha cannot stop himself praising him, “Truly symbols, precision of the language, economy of words, different eye catching forms and imagery with visual and non-visual concrete or subtle content as a whole are the hallmarks of Vihang A Naik as a poet.”

Mostly Naik has used free verse to write his poems in these collections which helps the poet to describe his feelings and experience regarding the existence and survival of human being in this universe. The theme of his poetry according to him; “it was life” and “life” is automatically connected with scientific and natural aspects, all incidents happening around “it” in the whole universe, all physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, religious, economic, historical, mythical, traditional cultural, political, social and environmental activities and elements have some effect on somebody’s life in some extent. All multi-coloured sheds of modern men’s life and city life has aesthetically woven in his poetry by him with the new vistas of his creative writing process or making poetry. The poems in his collection are the fine reflections of his creative writing, embodied poet’s imagination, and emotional intensity, intellectual and philosophical attitude which have been beautifully placed in his poetry with experiment. It has proved that his poetic collections are the literary landmark, not only for Vihang A. Naik but for the literary treasure of Indian English literature. Vihang A. Naik is a versatile poet who gave a new way to Indian literature by his concept of poetic creation by using multi- coloured themes is the requirement of modern era in which everything is continuously getting change quickly.

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( Short Bio.)

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I, durga Patva hereby declare that this present paper is my own written work and I have not sent it to anybody for publication. (Durgapatva)