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## Experimental Strain, Symbolism and Use of Metaphor in Vihang A. Naik's *City Times & Other Poems*

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### Abstract

Poetry is understood by many writers and authors as an 'expressive' of the human soul. Mill has declared that 'poetry, when it is really such, is truth; and fiction also, if it is good for anything, is truth: but they are different truths. The truth of poetry is to paint the human soul truly; the truth of fiction is to give a true picture of life. (67) This is quite reflected in Vihang A. Naik's *City Times & Other Poems*.

**Keywords:** *experimentation, symbolism, metaphor*

## Experimental Strain, Symbolism and Use of Metaphor in Vihang A. Naik's *City Times & Other Poems*

Dr Shamenaz Bano

Vihang A. Naik (1969) is an authentic Indian poetic voice in the contemporary scenario. He writes in English and Gujarati. His English poetry has been published in many literary journals and anthologies across India. His poems regularly appear in literary journals, magazines like 'The Indian P.E.N., Indian Literature, Kavva Bharati, POESIS: A Journal of Poetry Circle, Mumbai, The Journal of Poetry Society (India), The Journal of Indian Writing in English, The Journal of Literature and Aesthetics, The Brown Critique and many poetry anthologies and acclaimed e-magazines. His new poetry collection is *City Times & Other Poems* which is a collection of new & selected poems.

His other poetry collection includes *Poetry Manifesto* (2010), *Making A Poem* (2004) and his *City Times and Other Poems* first published in 1993. He is credited with publishing Gujarati language collection of poems named as *Jeevangeet* in 2001 which he dedicated to the cause of victims of Gujarat Earthquake 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2001. He also translated poetry from Gujarati language into English. Presently he is teaching at Shree Ambaji Arts College affiliated to Hemchandracharya North Gujarat, India.

Naik has dedicated the poetry collection to his mother and has divided it into six parts containing 68 poems based on many themes like religious, social, cultural, and political and economic and personal history. These parts have been entitled as, 'Love Song of a Journeyman', 'Mirrored Men', 'The Path of Wisdom', 'Self Portrait', 'At The Shore' and 'City Times.'

The very first poem of the section, 'Love Song of a Journeyman' 'in the collection is 'Your Upholding' which is subjective and symbolic in nature. As the lines reflects:

I'd then begun  
to hear wings  
in empty spaces.  
A song  
in the desert  
of my heart.  
A first journey.

Here, the poet has used a classical symbol such as 'wings' to convey his feelings regarding the presence of pure love in an individual life. A Symbol is something with stands for, or represents, or suggests something else. In literature symbols are mostly used by poets to depict different themes, situations, feelings and emotions. So, poets always use different symbols to convey their feelings and thinking and Naik too has

used this in his poetry and by using the symbol he is trying to make his poetry as an art form.

Poetry is an art and art preserves the world in its particularity. Cleanth Brooks argued, "Poetry is a unique kind of experience, which can never be captured in the kind of discursive description which constitutes a 'heresy of paraphrase'. Poetry is redemptive, in that it returns to us a more refractory original world, an ontologically distinct experience which offers a simulacrum of experiential fullness in the world outside of the text." (22)

Literature and especially poetry is based on imagination and this is somewhat experienced by the poet so he has written some poems which are based on imagination. The poem, 'You revealed the edge' is highly imaginative and symbolic in tone but subjective in nature describing pure love which is rarely found in the present world.

The other poems in this section 'includes; 'You broke Petals, and 'The Flower' which are subjective poems depicting some incidents in the life of the poet and 'The world', 'How long', 'Time' are symbolic poems. As the lines conveys:

Time  
preaches mortality.  
The day  
should give up  
to the night  
as the dead  
retires bodiless.  
Memory like candle  
lights  
a darkened room.

Here he seems to be critical and gives indication of agreeing with the views of Mathew Arnold in his famous book of criticism, *The Study of Poetry*. "Poetry", according to Matthew Arnold, is a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. And this he interprets as the application of ideas— grand ideas- to life.

In poems viz, "Spiders may have", 'Not only crab walks', 'Chameleon is not that great', and Naik has used the natural symbols like 'Spiders, 'Crab' and 'Chameleon' to convey human weaknesses like, wise, error and deceit. By doing so, he seems to compares these wicked human emotions with those insects and reptiles and the presence of these human follies in an individual's life. This can also be called as symbolic poetry.

As in poem, 'Man as he is, folly' he has specifically described about the various weaknesses and follies which a man possess, as the lines indicates:

Man as he is, folly  
vice, error, deceit  
occupies his heart. Here  
the light is gone. Truth,



various symbols or metaphors such as 'octopus', 'sand', 'serpent', 'garment', 'paper kites' and 'vultures' to revealed the emotions. As the lines of 'Desire' reveals:

the octopus  
of desire  
stirs  
arteries and veins  
tears flesh apart  
feeding upon fire  
swallowing air.

Here, he uses the natural metaphor of 'octopus' to describe human desire which is a highly intellectual comparison because as octopus, a sea animal has eight legs so that it can capture its prey from eight directions for its survival in the same way human being possess immense desire willing to capture from all directions and unfortunately sometimes these desires are entangled with each other like the legs of an octopus. So, in this way, he has artistically used the metaphor of octopus to describe human desire.

The last section, 'City Times' consists of poems describing about various cities of his state and around the world. "Plato believed that poetry and literature are inextricably tied up with the values and ideologies of the culture as a whole: art is not separate from the socio-political sphere. (40) This seems to be believed by Naik also as we can see poems based on political situations of our country like 'A Broken Song' and 'After Innocence.' These two poems are also highly symbolical in tone reflecting mis-happening and incidents of the past when massacre of many innocent had taken place around the world. As the lines in 'A Broken Lines indicates:

a child  
wouldn't see  
fears  
in  
a mirror

In the poem, he has used a metaphysical symbol such as, 'mirror' to convey a tragic story. Aristotle had the view that, tragic literature arouses a very specific set of emotions— pity and fear—and brings about a healthy and pleasurable experience called *catharsis*. (44) This may be believed by the Poet so he is emphasizing on tragic poetry also. As we see the reflection of this in 'After Innocence' as he conveys his concern on the killing of the innocence by reflecting these heart-touching lines:

fold all  
old calendars  
and smoke the time  
away  
what you get  
is ashes in return

the shell breaks open  
crossed teens  
innocence  
massacred

Here he also shares the views of New Critics sense of poetry as a primordial, world creating form of language, the view that poetry enacts experience rather than constituting a discursive amount of experience. F. R. Leavis eschewed the New Critical sense of autonomy of the poem as a verbal icon or well-wrought urn, insisting always that there are no literary values; that criticism, like literature, is always a judgment of life. He preferred to speak of 'practice in criticism' rather than 'practical criticism'. (22)

'On visiting grandfather's house' is a subjective poem depicting Poet's nostalgic attitude. He conveys his feelings about his grandfather whom he misses a lot and his city which has changed a lot. This subjective poem shows the poet's simplicity and humbleness as he has a concerned for his childhood days spend in his grandfather's house. A writer, when writes shows his innermost feelings and sometimes relates many things and incidents with his own personal life. This is why subjective poetry is considered as so remarkable. The poet is called subjective when he finds inspiration for his works in his own thoughts, emotions and experiences, and gives expression to his own feelings and impulses. The subjective writers drive within themselves, they steep in their own themes, in individuality and sensations. As Jack Magnus a reviewer from USA says:

'City Times' is a heady mix of beauty, life and visual astray of the abstract sculptures and buildings that form the skeleton of city. The section, 'On Visiting Grandfather's house is nostalgic and moody: Grandfather's/was a saint/now a photograph/ lies untouched in an attice." Time seemed to stand still for me as I read Naik's verse. Each word is used with precision; each image is clearly brought forth examined and then transformed into its successor.

In 'A sympathiser for underdogs' he has described about his city and has reflect his feelings for the poor people living there. There are poems like, 'Evening', 'City Voice' & 'Midnight City' in which he is talking about the change which are taking place in his city also the scenes of evening and midnight both in materialistic form and scenic beauty.

thro the fog of its winter  
you dart a vision  
to view a city  
hanged  
composed of unreal

In both the poems, he reflects his concern about the changes which cities are undertaking from natural scene to the man-made scene with the advent of science, technology and development. Poetry, as declared by Shelly is the well-known passage describing the moments of literary creation, 'is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. (52)

Naik has deep love and passion for poetry which is quite reflected in the poetry collection. His poems are enriched with the use of various natural and metaphysical metaphors and symbols. His reflection of philosophy when needed is quite praiseworthy. Almost all the poems in the collection are written in free verse. The poet has reflected his innermost feelings and experience on various issues of vital importance related to our existence and survival on this universe and has dealt successfully with some religious, social, cultural, and emotional themes in the book. The poems in the collection are creative pieces reflecting writer's imagination, emotional intensity, intellect and his attitude towards life. Chakravorty, a Literary Critic speaks about the volume:

This is a collection worth preserving with thoughtful  
insights at every fold and the inner tumult has been  
churned out with craft..... (web)

There is fine balance of themes which have been placed with the experimental strain. Some poems seem to be echoing of the past incidents which the poet may have experienced or witnessed. Each of his poems is crafted beautifully though some of them are sad and melancholic in tone and seems to be written from the heart. Throughout the book one can see emotions so deep so full of desperation. The poet's wisdom, depth and eagerness are really remarkable and must be praised.

As Jack Magnus, says, 'Reading City Times and Other Poems is a heady and illuminating experience. It's mostly highly recommended.' Another literary critic from India, L. L. Yogi opines:

The poet has something up his sleeves to say beyond the appearances. He does not describes what things are, but what they are stirring to be, in his consequences. Vihang Naik has proved his credentials through '*The City and Other Poems*, and is a poet with a future. (web)

All the poems in the collection reflect the writer's experience and demonstrate feeling even beyond their experiences. His experimental quality, use of symbols and metaphor are appreciable reflecting his emotions.

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