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A Decade of Disillusioned City Life: A Study of Vihang A. Naik's City Times and Other Poems

Goutam Karmakar

PhD Research Scholar
NIT Durgapur, West Bengal, India.

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Abstract

Vihang A Naik is considered to be one of the foremost contemporary poets in the field of Indo-Anglian literature. His poetry is thoughtful and spontaneous reflection on his experiences that he encountered from time to time. Deterioration of self and loss of hope are the key features in his poetry. A kind of eco-criticism pervades in his poems with a sudden realization of things unknown thereby bringing him up to the ultimate self-revelation. His poems are the innermost expression of varied and realistic moods of the poet. Precision of language, variations of experiences used in pouring out his thought and ideas are an added endeavor to his poetic craftsmanship. Each poem has been imbued with a philosophical blend of time telling us about the harsh realities of life being symbolic in tone. The poet has tried to show his innermost feelings and experience on many issues related to our existence and survival on this universe and has dealt successfully with some social issues. He has been able to use poetry as a tool for conveying his views and feelings about meditation and spirituality through his

poetry. An inner depth can be found in his poem that takes us to the city life in general stating the emptiness and the ignored aspect of City life where the readers may feel connected to each and every poem. There is fine balance of themes which have been placed with detailed experimentation.

Keywords: *loneliness, materialism, hopelessness, globalization, disillusionment*

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Goutam Karmakar

The thrill of city life appears to be fading in Vihang A Naik's city times and other poems published in the year 1993. His poems are rich in poetic craftsmanship, his expressions are abstract in forms and there are implementations of a variable pattern word use in his poetry with a deeper insight into meanings. He uses a very uncommon form of modern poetry and free verse, with a mixture overloaded with meanings. He addresses love affairs, the sound of city at night, and the search of wisdom, human nature and wild nature in 36 short but lively poems. The anthology of Vihang A Naik's city times and other poems consists of six different poems that show the disillusioned state of human psychology. The parts are 'Love song of a journeyman', 'Mirrored Men', 'The path of Wisdom', 'Self Portrait', 'At the shore', 'City times'. His other collection includes 'Poetry Manifesto' (2010) and 'Making a Poem' (2004). He had dedicated the poetry collection to his mother based on many themes like religion, social, cultural, political, economic and personal history. His poetry is an extreme attempt to dramatize human life's reality in the world inherited by today's audience:

“There
The road unwinds,
Where
You'll pick up
The race
And melt away
In the noises
Of a city
Whose streets
Lead you nowhere” (P.14).

The entire world is as cruel and harsh with no real progress. While appreciating the poetry of Vihang A Naik, Binod Mishra writes: “Vihang A Naik as a contemporary

Indian English poet adapts himself to the new trend of writing poetry regarding structure and themes and he experiments with technical terminologies in his poetic world and one can find plenty of irony with a realistic touch in his verses (xxvii)".

The poet laments upon the fact that there is an element of doubtfulness about the true meaning of life in his poem 'City times and other poems'. As Jack Magnus, says, "Reading City Times and Other Poems is a heady and illuminating experience. It's mostly highly recommended". It is this modern era about which the poet had mentioned as his poetry deals with the harsh, stern and stark realism of life with a sense of uselessness, pain and sorrow. His poetry throws light upon shattered dreams, vision and fantasies which are the manifestations of his conscious motives exploring the nature of irrational self. His legacy was to expose the darker side of human life in today's world. He talks about the unexplored heart of darkness and to gaze inwardly and discover a world with the warring forces that shake an individual's psyche and personality. He actually initiated a modernist portrayal of human nature taking place within the context of city life exclaiming:

"You
Become a touch,
Letters of words;
A perfumed card
In
A changed city" (P.15)

He mentions about an overwhelming feeling of disappointment in human life arising from the realization that something is not what it was believed or expected to be possibly accompanied by philosophical angst from having one's beliefs challenged. The poet's voice is exceptional that one cannot avoid or overlook. The poet feels ruined by the unhappiness of the city life and he had been feeling the good and bad sides of it. The way of changing lifestyle and its effect on quality of life of individual and community is constantly fluctuating. His poetry had expressed this concern through suitable poems and they merit our attention. His intuitive and philosophical lines instill among the readers a state of numbness and anxiety. The poem takes a forward step into the inward journey of a man and tries to explain how the outward life has captured people, the false appearance and the deceptions have become the major weapon of modern man and thus the true façade of real self is unseen. The poet takes his readers on a lyrical voyage of discovery against the backdrop of a city scape with an unnerving ability to see inside the hearts and minds of his readers. He has an undisputed talent for translating complex emotions with astonishing simplicity. They speak to the inner solitude of our individual selves with the poetic expressions found in his creations that allude to the spiritual and metaphysical contents of life reaching the higher territories of sharp intellectualism in life.

Vihang A Naik expresses his state of loneliness in the poem 'Love song of a journeyman' and he puts forth his thought from the importance of love to the devastating artificiality of modern man. The actual self of a man is no truth and one can become very much addicted to free will. 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". According to the poet, materialism has become the prime concept which can define the era of modern men. People have become what one can say devoid of humanity. He portrays the real image of the world saying:

"The world
Shrinks within
The boundaries
Of flesh" (P.13)

This materialism exists in physical matter, negates thought, feeling, human will and faith and it promotes the idolatry of possessions that is believed to fill all human need and characterization of quality life. There is a lack of empathy and engagement with others and this materialism is what the poet suggests that is both socially destructive and a process of self-destruction. It smashes the happiness and peace of mind of those who succumb to it. It is associated with anxiety, depression and broken relationships. The dreadful mistake of man is that they are allowing themselves to believe having more stuff enhancing well-being but this worldly ambition, material assumptions, perpetual growth, are a formula for man's unhappiness. He makes a difference about the transcendent existence and random existence. The man expresses his emotions of being utterly lonely in his life. The poet had evoked his inner feelings through the journeyman. He exclaims that he can hear the song of love in the 'desert' of his heart. Here the desert represents the sense of bareness and despair of his heart. He feels void and his discontentment is because his lover is no more in his life. This symbolizes about the disillusioned journey of his life devoid of love. The poet is found to be lamenting about the shattered dream and the promises they made 'on fluttering yearned to fly'.

The poet interprets a state of confusion in the mind of the protagonist who could not convince his beloved. The journeyman had been left with sad and depressed self like a 'journeyman' and he sings his love song all along his inner journey of life stating:

"I'd then began
To hear wings
In empty spaces.
A song
In the desert
Of my heart.
A first journey" (P.11).

'Mirrored men' is a strong poem, a type of documentary upon the ways of people. The last part of the poem makes a clear fact upon the actions of man as they are mirrored with spiders, crab, chameleon and man comes off as one of the most suitable example for such comparison:

"Truth is a mirror
He has lost" (P.27)

Philosophical in nature, each poem reflects a common theme 'Mirrored men' which parallels man in the process of change, and now their values are impacted as a result of this change,

“Not only crab walks
Crooked. Who has ever
Made man walk straight” (P.22)

In the period of globalization, materialism comes to be an important fact. He feels saddened and disheartened to see the sad plight of the contemporary times gripped with the notion and objectivity of physical pleasure depicting the realistic picture of ecological awareness. The hectic lifestyles of the people have turned from bad to worse and people are futile in different to the glorious past of the city where they are presently living in. There is a lack of ecological consciousness in his poem. His 'city voice' clearly describes the awkward situation. The poem titled self-portrait starts with the diagrammatic sketch with seven blank pages where the readers find only three words at the tail end of the pages. Thus the poet ensures an epiphany moment, the true nature of one's self when he wakes up 'to see myself, discovered beyond thought'. The ineffable epiphany may either suggest the discovery of a transcendental self beyond all thought and language or it may suggest the discovery of an absence beyond the human thought and speech. This feature is somewhat uncommon in the field of English literature, experiencing a kind of transcendental self. Path of wisdom is a poem for spiritual meditation that is effective as mystical writing:

“...consider words,
Their limitation.
Then leave yourself
With silence” (P.36)

The poet tries to find out something that is of a meaningful purpose of human existence. In this poetic endeavor he turns philosophically suggestive and normally instructive, showing 'The path of wisdom', the warns -'Listen! Death knocks' only to stir the people in the right direction to the path of virtues, putting away all the gross 'desire', 'pleasure' that they have fallen into due 'illusion'. The poetic onslaught of city life goes on as the poet comes up with an inner devotion in 'city voice'. The poet shows how vile politics and opportunities deteriorated the age of tradition of values, beliefs and customs. Such acts did not only harm the purity of thought but went further to cause division and disharmony among fellow human beings:

“An inspired child
Sketches of nuclear war
The world shivers
A polluted planet
The ganga screams for help” (P.71)

Deterioration and loss of physical beauty of trees and the nature makes the poet sad as he notices the weird development of the city in the guise of highway and stone sculpture where there is no actual presentation of the natural heritage. The last poem

'city times' shows the poet's innocence that he had passed and reflects on how he has been shaped and changed to maturity. The city with its complexities is used to reflect on the disillusioned life. This sense of uselessness of life is further reflected in his poem that is common call to the people to let the light remove the pervading darkness from the world.

In conclusion it can be said that there is a philosophical blend in his poems where the picture of modern life is brought forward. Poems are one of the most outstanding poems in modern Indian English poetry. Beneath the texture of lucid language lies an insightful and thought provoking meaning, which takes the readers a little more time to understand it completely. Each poem is well perceived and filled with imagery of hope and sadness, sensitive thoughts or the innocence of childhood, his discoveries of youth and the disillusionment with manhood. A sense of exile and self-alienation is prevalent in his poems through the hectic routine of city life. Each mood of life is brought and examined through the poet's illuminating experience of city life. The emotional intensity can be found with an insight into the realities of modern life. Each of his poems are interwoven beautifully even though they are sad and melancholic in tone and seems to be written from the heart. Throughout the book one can see emotions so deep that is full of desperation. The poet's wisdom, depth and eagerness are really remarkable and praiseworthy. The philosophical piece enclaves the environment in a way that can only be bound by an unusual creativity of mind exploring the human condition and the relation of the mind with the physical world.

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