



Back to Nature: A Retrospective Study of Vihang A. Naik

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Abstract

Vihang A. Naik is one of the most prominent poets of the post-modernist era and he stands as a unique figure in the history of Indian English poetry. His poetry is very perfect and artistically drawn. By anticipating his way on the working of nature, he weaves the theme of his poetry in a compact and organic form. Therefore it is not very surprising that his reputation had increased very high in this post-modernist age. He was a very keen observer of the relationship between man and nature and in this way he made use this study of nature as a material for his poetry. His realism draws the moral view of life and the perspective of environmental strain has been properly blended and completely fused with his view of life in his poems. His poetry deals with the importance and beauty of the natural countryside that was being overshadowed by the urban development as well as the ability it contained to help man find his true identity in a techno cultural society. His poetry took on the aspect of meditation reflecting his emotions and the events of the surrounding environment that contributed to his stress. His poetry is considered as an outlet for him to go beyond the inter-textual interpretation by a dialogue between man's external self and inward soul in a modern society. This paper therefore mainly focuses upon the retrospective view in the poet's call for getting back to the nature as the nature is one of the driving forces for making an individual develop a deeper appreciation of things.

Keywords: Nature, Resource, Environment, Poetry, City, Society.

1. Introduction

The natural world had always been a determining factor for poets and prose writers. Nature serves not just as a passive setting but much more, against which compelling actions unfold a pretty backdrop of setting in the natural world. According to Naik, nature represented the truest forms of divinity, untouched by the corruption of the growing urban cultured life that was gradually reshaping humanity or the modern human civilization. His four collection of poetry includes 'Poetry Manifesto: new and selected poems' (2010), 'Making a Poem' (2004), 'City Times and other poems' (1993). His Gujarati collections of poems are entitled as 'Jeevangeet' published in the year 2001. Through his poems, he speaks about the natural consciousness of human beings to preserve natural resources because of their unfair treatment of nature that have brought our ecosystem to a verge of non-reversibility and imbalance. 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." (Mishra, xxvii). One cannot deny the fact that nature always had an immense effect upon the development of everyone's life. The power of nature alters an individual's life as it reflects out the hidden elements of the individual workings in the society. A change in the working can be noticed in the sequence of events by nature's compelling force. The essence of his works demonstrates how a connection with nature changes a person's view. In the poet's opinion the setting of nature creates a feeling of exuberant joy as he states in his poem 'Ambaji':

“The rocks smell of sweat
And dirt. The only poetry
That keeps you alive
Among rocks, glazing marbles
And snaking streets” (Ambaji, p.16)

In his view, nature is the driving force that makes a person develop a deeper appreciation for things that have always been around him. He is a poet who completely celebrates Indian nature as he loved it and mostly observed life being outdoors. He justifies it in his poem ‘Indian summer’:

“The map of India burns
With flames of passion
When fire is set
Against mid-day” (Indian Summer, p.13)

His writings were inspired by the beauty of Indian nature and he is mainly concerned with the environmental glory of Indian nature feeling deeply passionate about it. Jitendra Arolia very rightly remarks that: “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” (Arolia, 248). The poet notices how society is just out to get material things and people do not care about nature and on the damage done to it. He was concerned about nature and the effects it had upon the society. He viewed nature as an emblem of divine power and his poetry invokes the spiritual nature of the world as he contrasts nature with the world and its need for materialism. He mentions about the materialistic techno cultural age in his poem ‘New Websight’ stating:

“Your vision
Makes an inductive
Leap
The fear grips
An e-age as the century
Turns” (New Websight, p. 11)

The poet mentions that so many people are caught up in materialistic things that they do not stop and look around at the simple beauties of the world. People are absorbing themselves in materialism and distancing themselves from nature. In today’s society there are so many modern conveniences that most of the people do not rely on earth for any need as in his poem he mentions about the useless felling or cutting down of the trees for meeting the growing demands of urban population:

“To unearth the roots
Of a banyan
Is never easy

Chop or hack. The old banyan” (The Banyan City, p. 14)

People do not use earth as a natural resource and therefore he feels that one should get back to using earth as a resource by taking better care of it. The earth and nature is very important for existence and one must do everything to take the best care of it. His poems mainly refer to the materialistic progress of mankind and he reveals his perceptive of oneself in the modern society. People are materialistic and do not slow down enough to enjoy the simpler things in life like observing the beauty of nature. Nature is essentially a compound that seeks to show a new form of enlightening the human spirit and urges the establishment for the inspiration of a deeper understanding. He explores the idea of nature as an instructor to man and how man can learn from nature. He expounds that nature is a divine creation of god and through it man can learn to be closer to god. Despite the reverence, awe and prerequisite mental status, he presents the concept of nature being nothing without human interpretation. He was deeply interested in the simple village folk and the peaceful rural life where people live in contact with nature. He talks about the loss of power, freedom and virtue of human soul. Nature was taken to be one of the main focuses of his poetry 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. 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” (Jack Magnus, Reviewer for Reader’s Favourite, USA, 2015). The poet notices flower, observes it and finds it colorless and scentless. Quickly he finds that it is not the flower but it is past and he graphically offers the image of past through the flower:

“The flower

Devoid of colour

And scent

A fossilized past” (The flower, p. 89)

His poems revisit the familiar subjects of nature and memory. His technique implies an inherent unity between man and nature making it an effective method for instilling the feeling of illustrating mankind’s identity to be found through nature. The poet possesses the penetrating insight to look within the seasons and he finds summer “a roasting season” where “the smell lingers of flesh and blood”. In this season he finds buffaloes taking rest on muddy waters and stray dogs while lying on leakage from gutters. What a man thinks of summer, its activities and the way to face it is beautifully illustrated in this poem. He describes the natural scenario of Indian summer explaining the environment of unreasonably warm and dry weather. His poem contains many images that help to explain the poet’s feeling towards the found unity between man and nature. This helps to capture the harmonious essence of nature within his poem. His poem confronts the sorrow underlying the season’s creativity. He like the romantic poets expressed his own current mood by making use of nature in his poetry. His poetry portrayed many significant aspects of the human mind by symbolically representing the emotions and thoughts with the spiritual and natural themes. Professor Satish Kumar comments “The new poetry is remarkable for its 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” (Kumar,8). Nature in his poetry is viewed as a backdrop to the urban changing society. He had very well crafted the increasing pollution in the urban areas, water shortage, shrinking forests and depletion of biodiversity as in his poem ‘City’ he exclaims:

“The world shivers
A polluted planet
The Ganga screams
For help” (City, p. 118)

The poet describes the city as viewed from a person’s individual opinion emphasizing upon the effect of modernized life on the minds of people in the society. He had been a vocal advocate for nature and the most predominant feature of his poetry is the new role of individual thought and personal feeling. He found the source of poetry as a particular unique experience and reflected upon the fact to view nature as a source of beauty and aesthetic experience. Shashikant Sharma states that: “The poems of the book provide 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” (Sharma, 781). He explicitly links nature with art by finding powerful natural metaphors and imagery to articulate his ideas about men’s understanding of nature in this universe. He uses the nature imagery explaining the inquisitiveness to fly like birds in the way of writing a poem by stating:

“Sometimes you feel the urge to fly
With birds against the sun
...did you instruct your hand to move
Or make a poem?” (Making of a poet, p. 78)

The poet relates himself to a long thematic journey and incorporating his own act by creating a connection with the beauty of the city and the natural world. He invokes the Indian environment to sweep him out of the busy city life. His idea of human consciousness, imagination, liberty that stimulates the human mind can be very well traced in his poems. He asks the nature to be his metaphorical spirit and poetic talent that will allow him to obtain a peaceful state of mind from the humdrum of busy urban city life. His poems have different literary devices that help to illustrate his feelings effectively for the readers. The devices help to illustrate his feelings effectively for the readers. The devices help to reflect a creative and effective way of revealing the poet’s emotions to the reader without any problem. 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’ as he exclaims about the journey:

“Look ahead
The journey is short
There the road unwinds,
Where
You’ll pick up
The race” (How long, p. 86)

Nature in Naik’s poems is truthfully a living character through which human identity is constructed either through the character’s alignment with the natural world or the struggle against it. For the poet, nature is often a source of respite, both for body and for the soul. Further, it is where

the intuition ignites and teaches man to understanding. The poet relates about the insight into the universal order that always takes place in the mind of the individual through one's experience of nature and the inner powers of receptiveness. Man in his physical existence is a part of material world. Reading his poem is an experience of lifetime. Readers often lost in his poetry and in his contemplating potentiality over nature. One such comment is made by Dr. Kalyani Dixit: "Poetry Manifesto is indubitably a gem in the treasure box of contemporary Indian English poetry. Since the experimental strain, philosophical expressions and emotional intensity displayed by Vihang A. Naik is exceptional. Reading of this collection instills the sense of satisfaction and wondrous pleasure in the hearts of the readers" (Dixit, 4).

2. Conclusion

Throughout his poems, the poet refers to man's separateness from nature through his busy materialistic life. Man's artistic expression is inspired by the beauty of nature and he analyses the environment or nature that might actively interfere in society's behavior concerning the ecological problems prevalent today. A literary critic from India, L. L. Yogi opines: "The poet has something up his sleeves to say beyond the appearances. He does not describe what things are, but what they are stirring to be, in his consequences. He has proved his credentials through 'The City and Other Poems, and is a poet of the future" (Web). Hence, he explores nature in its entirety in a philosophical reflection on nature's creative power that lead to an ultimate consideration of the state of society and man's relationship with the universe. His poems also portray the poet's struggle to understand nature and man's creative and distinctive parallel forces which still exist today, where man's insatiable need to meet the demands of an ever-growing population, has been widely viewed to be destroying the earth's ecosystem, be it through pollution or the exploitation of natural resources. In this way, the poet sharply draws a retrospective view of the nature in his poetry with the back to nature statement.

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