

Master ji with scorn, contempt and viciousness. The narrative grows dense as the reader wonders whether Masterji would triumph or succumb to the pressures of circumstances. The murder turned suicide of Masterji by his own community leads to shock and yet an acceptance of the murderers.

Adiga has managed, as in his earlier works, to reveal and expose the corruption and violence bred in societies because of the overwhelming capitalist and consumerist culture. The human greed which becomes insatiable leads to the violence of the extreme – murder. Nothing evokes the dormant humanity of the people. Life goes on and the societies and people move on. The book raises several moral and ethical questions and interrogates the values prevalent in the contemporary Indian society.

NEELIMA KANWAR
Associate Professor of English
Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla

Vihang A. Naik, *Poetry Manifesto (New & Selected Poems)*, New Delhi: Indialog, 2010, pp. 72, Rs. 80 (HB).

Indian poetry in English is a threatened genre. It seems to have fallen into bad days over the last decade or two. Nissim Ezekiel is dead, so are Kamala Das, Ramanujan, Dom Moraes and several other talented poets. True, there is still some good poetry that is published occasionally. Keki Daruwalla continues to write and so do a few young poets like Arundhati Subramaniam, Meena Kandaswamy and others, but on the whole, the picture is not very optimistic with the over-enthusiastic spirit of cultural nativism that has been sweeping the country of late. While poetry in regional languages seems to thrive, that written in English seems to be languishing. We seem to forget that English too is now an Indian language, which is why it is essential to encourage writers who attempt to write their verses in English.

Vihang Naik is a poet from Gujarat who has gained a fair amount of recognition in his home state as a poet and translator. Along with poetry in Gujarati, he has also penned some verse in English and the collection under review brings together several of his old poems along with some new additions. There is no denying that Naik's is a perceptive, poetic appreciation of the world: the sensitivity, the intuitive grasp of emotion, the near-concrete imagery and the manner in which he grasps a finite moment and freezes it in verse – all this is worthy of admiration. This is what a reader expects from a poet. Naik's work evidently merits a closer look.

This is a collection of 72 poems. Apparently only the

first 28 poems are new while the rest are recycled. There are some exceptionally good poems among the old ones, for instance, when the poet speaks of "Dead poets" in his "A Disturbed Sleep":

"Dead poets
haunt your dreams
and disturb your sleep.

You wake up,
startled
as in a battlefield
fighting the airy nothing.

Last night,
you remember,
the mosquito fight
you could not win." (48)

There is a subtle humour in this poem, the element of surprise that bears testimony to the author's intelligent approach to poetry.

Speaking of dead poets, it is interesting to note that the dedication of the collection is to "Nissim Ezekiel / A.K. Ramanujan / Dom Moraes / Arun Kolatkar / Dilip Chitre" all of them dead poets who have probably been an inspiration to Naik. Walking in their footsteps, perhaps Naik aspires to reach the same heights of fame, a legitimate enough ambition for an upcoming poet. It is reminiscent of a similar thought expressed by Dante in his *Divine Comedy* where he imagines himself in the company of great minds of the past: Horace, Juvenal, Virgil, Homer and Ovid. Dante, as we know, succeeded in fulfilling his ambition and is now listed among the greats; let us hope that Naik's dreams, too, are realized.

This reviewer, however, has a few doubts about the poetry. In the first place, the title of the anthology, "Poetry Manifesto," sounds presumptuous. It would be accepted had it come from an established writer of international acclaim but from one who is little known on the Indian literary scene, it smacks of arrogance, as though the poet is laying down rules that should govern poetry. A little more modesty is called for.

Another point relates to the language of the poetry. One is familiar with the term "poetic license" but poetic license does not mean incorrect grammar. True, the reader expects some manipulation of syntax and word play but when one comes across a phrase like "Now/ since hundred years" or a "slut searching / the father of her children", it is a bit difficult to swallow the faulty grammar. There are several such examples.

Turning now to some specific poems for their 'poetic'

worth, take a look at the section entitled "Self Portrait" which comprises just one poem. Yes, just one poem, "I" which reads:

"wake up
To see my
 Self"

This is a complete poem, if you please. Here is another in its entirety:

"songs without words

Of some
Sailor lost"

So what is the manifesto governing such poetry? In fact this kind of verse makes the reader wonder how exactly one would define poetry. Is it just a random juxtapositioning of stray words and phrases? A whimsical juggling of sounds? Or is there something more? Is there

not some discipline, some regimentation, some hard labor involved in writing poetry?

My advice to Vihang Naik would be to impose a design on his verse and to keep in mind what W.B Yeats said of poetry:

"A line will take us hours maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught."
W. B. Yeats, "Adams Curse"

Even without strict rhyme or meter or stanzaic patterns poetry can be poetry. But there is something missing in Naik's collection that he would do well to strive for. He has the potential and some talent. This, combined with dedication and discipline may indeed give him a place among the practitioners of Indian poetry in English.

MANJU JAIDKA
Professor of English
Panjab University, Chandigarh