

**Vihang A. Naik's 'Indian Summer': A Colourful Indian Painting with  
Multiple Meanings**

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**ABSTRACT**

*'Indian Summer' is a beautiful Indian painting in words with multiple layers of meaning demonstrating Vihang A. Naik's poetry manifesto. The idiom of his poetry manifesto speaks of unexpected thing in colours that vary from black and white to bloody via VIBGYOR. Being modern in spirit, this poem seems to be Naik's wasteland where people hear the song of Koel from engines and smoke pipes. It reveals a ray of hope in the dream of 'rain and thunder' despite the flames (of passion) that burn and make blind with heat and dust. Rain and thunder give a meaning to life and so become the redemptive powers. The poem is pictorial in effect with its illustrative and demonstrative imagery.*

**Keywords:** *Koel, rain and thunder, heat and dust, redemptive powers, the waste land*

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(I)

Jayanta Mahapatra's view that "more bad poetry is being published now than ever before in Indian history" (*Door of Paper* 127) seems to be worth considering. If the present scenario is taken into consideration, one finds poets rare and poetasters everywhere. Despite the fact of the poetic barrenness, there are some refreshing voices like Vihang A. Naik who have enriched the domain of Indian Poetry in English with their rich imaginative faculty and skill in experimenting with contents and expressions.

(II)

Vihang A. Naik is a poet from Surat (South Gujarat) though he continues his topographical journey via Baroda to Ahmadabad and, then, to Ambaji (North Gujarat). This journey proves to be a good asset for his poetic outcome. He communicates what he feels and experiences. His intuition overpowers his reasoning faculty and stirs him to the depth of creation.

What strikes in his poetry is the way of life that he not only enjoys himself but makes the reader feel it also. While appreciating the poetry of Vihang A Naik, Binod Mishra writes:

Vihang Naik as a contemporary Indian English poet adapts himself to the new trend of writing poetry as regards structure and themes. He experiments with technical terminologies in his poetic world yet one can find plenty of irony with a realistic touch in his verses. (xxvii)

(III)

Vihang A. Naik's 'Indian Summer' is a thoroughly Indian poem that makes the reader feel heat and dust of the summer season so lively that he begins to long for rain. Here is quoted the poem 'Indian Summer' from his poetry collection, *Poetry Manifesto (New & Selected Poems)*:

The 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.

The song of a Koel coos  
from engines and smoke pipes.  
Find yourself in the arms  
of summer; a roasting  
season  
where the smell lingers  
of flesh and blood  
burning alive.

Buffaloes rest  
on muddy waters, and stray dogs  
on leakage from gutters.  
Summer shadows move  
and float upon baked soil.

The wings of a fan persists,  
unexhausted. Look out!  
Through the iron grills  
on the tongue of a dragon  
is the boiling sun,  
while, locked up, you dream  
of rain and thunder. (13)

(IV)

What the poet Vihang A. Naik writes about the poem 'Indian Summer' is worth mentioning.

It was my 'Heat and Dust' and my frequent trips and travels of 1994 that made me express in 'Indian summer', which appeared in The Indian P.E.N 56.1-3 (January-March 199): 15-16. It was, as I said, extreme heat and the symbols I used were from daily life of city. I used to stay then in Baroda of Gujarat, India. Of course, I was even occupied by the city as a then worth exploring. In my search of identity and relating to places, I felt locked up from within while dreaming of relief of some rain and thunder. The poem now reads as many layers with multiple meanings. (Afterthought, response through an email on 29 March 2015)

(V)

Summer is the warmest season which brings heat and dust that makes the people irritated while affecting their working aptitude. The poet feels that when it is mid-day, it burns the map of India with "flames of passion." This is the time when people use engines, generator and others such things to have a soothing and cool temperature. These machines throw the smoke and create pollution. Summer seems to be a roasting season that roasts the people who feel the smell of flesh and blood out of burning. During this season buffaloes take rest on muddy waters while the dogs are found near the leakage from gutters. The soil burns. Due to the burning the soil seems to be baked. The wings of a fan continue to move without being exhausted. No doubt the people confine themselves to the rooms but the heat of the sun enters through the iron grills. This is the time when people feel irritated and become perspired to the extent that they begin to dream of rain and thunder.

(VI)

The poem 'Indian Summer' can also be decoded from the viewpoint of sex. Summer is the beloved to whom a man is attached to the extent of ending his 'ego' or 'self' by burning in the fire of passion of sex. Morning is the childhood, mid-day or noon the youth, evening the old age and night death. Here the poet focuses on mid-day or noon when the whole map of his body burns with the flames of passion which results in the longing for sex. Flames of passion become his lust which longs for a city where he can have his longing fulfilled but fails to find such city as simply proves to be a mirage. What he finds is heat and dust around him. Summer takes him in arms and roasts him so naturally that he smells of flesh and blood and finds him burning alive in the fire of sex. The love game begins on his baked body where summer starts dancing while revealing its shadows. The lungs continue to breathe in and out and remain unexhausted. The male organ sun boils and begins to melt in its fire. The sun, no doubt, comes on the tongue of dragon but is locked in the arms of summer as soon as it enters through the iron grills. The man boils within and wishes to be released to the extent that he begins to dream of rain and thunder which, to him, will bring peace and calm.

(VII)

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya uses the metaphor of dog in the poem 'Noon.' Noon is the dog and God is the master who has left the dog noon free from the chain.

The noon a mystic god with paws of fire  
Runs through the sky in ecstasy of drouth

Licking the earth with tongue of golden flame  
Set in a burning mouth. (*The Golden Treasury* 194)

Man burns with desires. To fulfill his desires, he runs here and there and remains restless. He chases his own shadow while the real pleasure is within. Noon is released by the secret Master. When noon is tired while running here and there in the sky, it drinks cool draughts from the streams and, again, the Master takes it and binds in chain. Then it goes to sleep and rest among hills. This is what happens with a human being. It is a kind of journey which begins with the birth and continues upto old age till he is called again by the Master Supreme Soul and chained so that he may take rest.

Vihang A. Naik's poem 'Indian Summer' is in the line of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya's 'Noon.' The poem reveals several philosophical threads if it is deciphered from the philosophical angle. It is a poem of redemption. The gold becomes pure when it is put into fire. Flames of passion rise during mid-day which is the period of a man's youth. This is the period when the youth begins to imagine a utopia in his mind that is lost somewhere within because of the clouds of heat and dust which obscure his vision that fails to see the goal or destination clearly. The youth fails to judge himself and so is lost in the materialistic pleasures which blind him for the time being. The Koel sings within but he is so lost that he finds that the song is coming from the engines and smoke pipes, which form the basis of materialism. The sun is the real master who creates illusion through summer. The summer roasts the youth completely and takes him in arms so tightly that he thinks that here lies his salvation, his heaven. Pleasure of flesh becomes his thirst. The smell of blood seems to be pleasant. He feels pleasure while burning himself in the fire of materialism. He forgets that autumn, winter and other seasons are in the queue. He is trapped in the illusion of summer. Who creates this summer? His vision is lost. He is not spiritual and sensible and so moves away from the right path—path of spiritualism. He fails to search for the sun within. He is satisfied with summer—the illusion created by Maya to test him. His desires and longings are buffaloes and stray dogs which remain satisfied with the materialistic things like muddy water and gutters. The fan of his longings, desires, dreams, ambitions, physical pleasures etc., continues to move. The Sun boils so promptly that it sits on the tongue of dragon and passes through the iron grills in order to enter the room where the man is lost in illusion of pleasures. When the man is alone in the room, he peeps within and finds the sun there. Then he dreams of rain and thunder which makes him shower with love, mercy, compassion and tolerance. The rain makes him wet with these qualities while thunder breaks the nets of illusion. The poem ends in the note of hope—hope for redemption. The sun within is the sun that counts, not the sun that tests him through the illusion of summer which burns him with the flames of passion—the passion of lust and greed for materialistic pleasures.

#### (VIII)

The poem 'Indian Summer' is modern in spirit and reminds somewhere some lines of Eliot's *The Wasteland* which ends on a note of hope for future. 'Indian Summer' is Naik's wasteland where people hear the song of Koel not from Koel but from engines and smoke pipes. Engines and smoke pipes are the Koels which continue to sound but this sound does not irritate them but seems to be soothing like the song of the Koel. Pollution is not bad but has become a part of life. People are lost in utopia of their own. They are so lost in themselves that they have become mirage or city. Isolation and alienation have become the ingredients of life. People have

developed cities within cities which have resulted in the internal diaspora that separates man from man. Life seems to be absurd. Values have lost their meanings in the fire of passions. What remains is flesh and blood. Purposelessness and meaninglessness have become the way of life. He does not know where to go but the moment he looks within he reminds of the sun within. The sun creates a longing in him to the extent that he dreams of rain and thunder. This rain and thunder give him meaning to his life so convincingly that they become the redemptive powers for his wasteland. Rain and thunder will remove the desolation of his wasteland within. Heat loses its warmth. Passions are calmed down. Dust dies and stays on the ground. The view becomes clear for the vision—the vision of life that lies in the redemptive powers. The desolated wasteland with the redemptive powers has the possibility of becoming a fertile land. Hence the poem is modern by virtue of its connecting links that links the parting threads into one thread—the thread woven with *Datta* (to give), *Dayadhvam* (to have compassion) and *Damyata* (to have self-control) culminating in *Shantih, Shantih, Shantih*.

#### (IX)

Vihang A. Naik's 'Indian Summer' is technically sound and faultless. It is a poem of 27 lines in free verse. Though it has no rhyme, it flows—flows with its simple and natural diction. Fusion of feelings with idea is its hallmark. The image of flames is associated with the passions. He talks of the city, lost in a mirage. The image of 'mirage' brings the union of feeling and idea on the screen of the mind of the reader who finds himself lost in search of the mirage and somewhere feels affinity with the poet persona.

Vihang A. Naik employs the technique of using 'you' to make the reader feel his feelings and passions. The poem is in the form of a dramatic monologue. The poet seems to be talking to someone. The presence of 'you' is felt till the end of the poem though this 'you' never talks or speaks. The poet makes this 'you' feel what he himself feels or experiences. The poet persona is in conflict right from the beginning of the poem when he presents the conflicts of his mind in association with 'you.'

The poem is noted for the use of beautiful imagery which is illustrative and demonstrative. Lines like "Through the iron grills / on the tongue of a dragon / is the boiling sun" and "the wings of a fan persists / unexhausted" are the instances of Naik's faculty in the use of imagery. He also employs figures to make his expression more impressive and effective. Instances like "summer shadows move / and float upon baked soil" and "the song of a Koel coos / from engines and smoke pipes" prove Naik's skill in the use of figures. The whole poem consists of 11 sentences in four stanzas. The poet has used 'when' in the first stanza, 'where' in the second, 'and' in the third and 'while' in the third stanza as connectives.

'Indian Summer' is pictorial in its effect. When the reader goes through the words like 'map', 'burns', 'flames', 'fire', 'mirage', 'sun', 'dust', 'koel', 'muddy waters', 'leakage from gutters', 'shadows', 'fan', 'dragon', 'rain', 'thunder' etc., he is reminded not only of the mentioned things in themselves but of the things associated with them. Instances like "flames of passion", "a roasting season", "the boiling sun" and "baked soil" prove his skill in the use of effective phraseology. The poet hears when 'Koel coos.' He feels the touch when he is "in the arms of summer." He smells of "flesh and blood." He sees dogs, buffaloes, koel and dragon. He

uses eyes, skin, nose and ear to see, to touch, to smell and to hear respectively. He makes a beautiful use of contradictions when he talks of summer on one side and rain and thunder on the other. He weaves the two contradictory threads into one. His use of the symbols like koel, dogs, engine, fan, dragon, rain and thunder need no explanation. What the reader misses is the taste of mangoes, found during the summer season in India.

(X)

‘Indian Summer’ reveals his poetry manifesto. For him poetry is purely “an unexpected thing” even to the point of silliness. It may be a nightmare or may be a dream. What he makes out of words is a paper poem. What counts is the poem, not its ‘why’, ‘how’ and ‘what.’ Its colour may vary right from black and white to bloody. Here is quoted his ‘Poetry Manifesto’ which runs thus:

Yes, 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.  
Or let there be VIBGYOR

paper poems. (*Poetry Manifesto* 42)

The poem ‘Indian Summer’ has all the colours—black and white, bloody and VIBGYOR and is replete with multiple meanings. It is a beautiful Indian painting which reveals layers of meaning when it is decoded from various perspectives. It releases a ray of hope in the dream of rain and thunder despite the flames (of passion) that burn the youth and make him blind with heat and dust.

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