

The Criterion

December 2012

ISSN 0976-8165

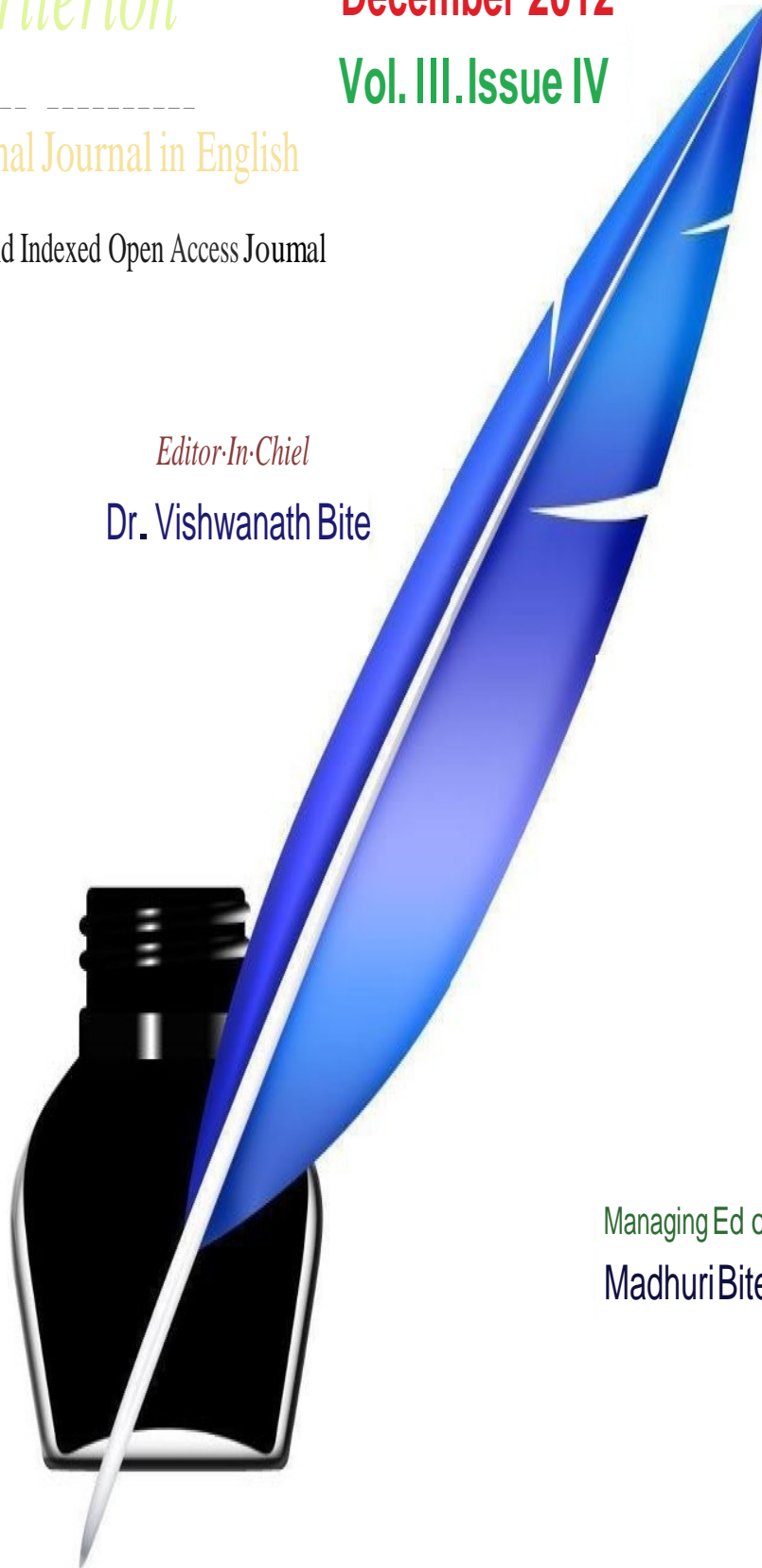
Vol. III. Issue IV

An International Journal in English

Quarterly Refereed and Indexed Open Access Journal

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Vihang A. Naik, Indian Poet in Conversation with Vishwanath Bite**Dr. Vishwanath Bite**

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Editor-In-Chief**The Criterion:** An International Journal in Englishwww.the-criterion.com**and****Editor-In-Chief****Galaxy:** International Multidisciplinary Research Journalwww.galaxyimrj.com

VB : Tell us a bit about your early family , life and education.

VN : I was born to Gujarati parents in Surat, Gujarat. After my birth my parents left the city, where I was born, Surat. They soon left the city to arrive at Baroda. My primary schooling was at Navrachana School, Baroda. I shifted often from Baroda to Ahmedabad. Changed cities. And schools. Now it is the journey that remains with me, my memory. I used to scribble verses during later part of my schooling. Of course, after school I then entered the portals of The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. By this time I burnt one collection of poetry written in English by me during my early period of writing. I don't know, but this personal event of my burning my collection was published in local newspaper when at twenty four my published book of poetry was on stand in 1993. Here I was introduced to Philosophy and Dr. G. N. Devy at MSU who encouraged me to read out from my published first collection at Commonwealth Meet Up organized by him where he released my City Times & Other Poems. I had just completed my Undergraduate Programme in Philosophy and English Literature then. It was just then after participating in National Seminar on Teaching Creative Writing: A Creative Approach conducted by Clark Blaise from Iowa at M. S. University of Baroda my ideas on poetry were formulated and later Prof. P. C. Kar who was there for my Post Graduate Programme called me to present my views on poetry at

his recently founded Forum On Contemporary Theory. As participant I presented my Poetry Manifesto (an essay) propounding views on poetry and arts . Along with my post graduate programme I tried to establish poetry circle at MSU where practicing poets would come and read out from any languages including English. It did survive as long as I was there. From South Gujarat via Ahmedabad and Prantij (the place I used to commute for teaching assignment while staying in Ahmedabad during 1996 – 97) Now I am at Ambaji in North Gujarat teaching at Shree Ambaji Arts College since last fifteen years or so .

VB : Do you recall how your interest in writing poetry originated ? .

VN : It was during my teens that Muse caught me. It is difficult to locate the origin or time. If I recollect... it was somewhere around my ninth grade that I wrote my first poetic lines, to my utter surprise it was my first verse. To be more precise I used to take morning walks at Maharishi Arvind Garden, Fatehgunj, Baroda. We lived very near to this garden. I believe garden is not pre condition of writing poetry but you see, the environment and the times and historical personal and social conditions must have caused me to take up the pen. I used to scribble verses during my morning walks in Garden. Then I often reworked them to bring out aesthetic quality. Often read out to friends and at poetry circles.

VB : What inspires you to write and why?

VN : Whenever I look around at simple things of life , the simplest moments of life has enough strength to inspire me. One has to be sensitive to environment in which one lives, one's culture and tradition and make one's own way; find one's own voice form the churning of society. I do not call myself a prolific writer. I write little. It is only something which is churning around for some time and you feel uncomfortable until you put it down on paper and spell it out aloud. There is red blood of poetry spreading before your eyes. You see it flow with life.

VB : Who or what influenced your writing once you began?

VN : There are incidents , accidents , conflicts within you and with your environment . Meeting people and visiting places often trigger emotions and visions. Moving around , walking through cities and villages and places both ancient and modern will make you write. But writing is a complex process.

VB : What do you consider the most challenging about writing Poetry?

VN : Not to make direct statement and call it poetry . Not to end up writing lines in the shadow of imitation. Follow your own vision and be your own voice.

VB : How would you describe your style?

VN : Though I have not developed a registered school of poetry. I certainly have inclination towards experimental school with Navrachana. One thing is there I have not fallen trap into strict meter and diction at the cost of poetry. It is by practice you gain your own style and experiments with diction taking your own culture and tradition in your works. Style follows as you practice writing poetry.

VB : What is your greatest strength as a poet?

VN : Only that score I would like to leave it up to the reader to decide.

VB : Have you ever had writer's block? If so, what do you do about it?

VN : You often feel that your muse has left or deprived or betrayed you. Every writer or poet has that phase. But I would certainly like to force myself into poetry during that phase. In India we are blessed with multi lingual environment. Indulge yourself in translation.

VB : Is there a message in your books that you want readers to grasp?

VN : I never thought to be a messenger. A poem should never be a hand maid of dogma or a creed. Whatever I did want to express is there in the works.

VB : What are your goals as a poet?

VN : I do not have any explicit agenda on hand. I don't think I am that goal oriented person. But to make people sensitive to impulse of life would be suitable reply at present. If human awareness is achieved by writing poetry it would be worth it. The awareness that every human being has one source wit , of course, various cultures and traditions and enjoy the plurality of life.

VB : Which trends you notice in post-Independence Indian Poetry in English ?

VN : Indian English poetry have had complex relation with trends or movements abroad. Some healthy and some not so healthy. From the birth of IEP it has this love and hate relationship. The way English poetry had relationship with Greeks, French, and German and Russian schools to name some. But I do hesitate to label 'Indian Poetry' as a singular term. IP is plural from the beginning as India is multi-cultural and multi-lingual country. Indian English poet cannot remain unaffected. In fact, the more regional, local culture it imbibes the more potent it becomes which is practice with African and Caribbean poetry. Of course, Indian English idiom will still develop further as it becomes conscious of its own cultures and environment seeing the potentiality of multi-cultural characteristics of India. I have always found Indian Poetry to be plural in character as India is multi-cultural and multi-lingual country unlike mono – cultural and lingual trends and movements. Here poetry of Indian Languages may influence Indian English poetry. At times it may happen the other way, even while in translating poetry. What we have in not poetry but poetries in India.

VB : What are some of the best tools available today for poets, especially those just starting out?

VN : Today the world is in front of you , the internet technology which was not available in ancient days of poets . Ours is not the age of tall prophetic poets. This

is an age of poetry. We don't see tall poets now though the number of poetry written today out numbers than any other age.

VB : Do you have any advice for upcoming poets?

VN : I do not , in fact , like to give advice . But , you see, reading good poetry certainly helps you do reveal your poetic art in a better way. Never to imitate and be your own voice with definite style , developing your own diction . Express your own vision. The sensitivity to your environment is stepping stone to writing better poetry.

VB : Do you have any specific last thoughts that you want to say to your readers?

VN : Readers are real people who make poems. Readers are most vital members in poetry community. Without readers there is no poetry. It is the reader who breathes life into a poem. Keep reading.

VB : What do you do to unwind and relax?

VN : Walking or listening to blues .

VB : What dreams have been realized as a result of your writing?

VN : That I am human. That my heart beats. That I am alive and I am like other human being.

VB : Tell us something about your first anthology *City Times and Other Poems*.

VN : I burnt my first collection of poems written in English during my teens than something in me changed , I began in new mode of writing , collected it and it was City Times while I was working for it through my teens and it was then when I was just twenty four in Baroda, the cultural capital of Gujarat. A poem to express its content needs experimentation and innovation without which there would never be newness and addition to culture and tradition. Versification that is meter or the

rhythmic structure may not be apparently present or visible but it has internal structure. Versification often is artificial or ornamental with forced rhyming which a free verse shuns. And experimental poetry avoids. There is a poem titled “Self – Portrait” with seven blank pages with punch line which runs as “discovered beyond thought”.

VB : Tell us something about your first anthology *Making A Poem* .

VN : I were discussing the theory of making a poem in an informal way at The M. S. University of Baroda during 1993 – 1995 where we had started Poetry Reading Circle at Dept. of English , MSU Baroda . I received informal permission from Dr. G. N. Devy and Prof. P. C. Kar at Dept. of English to hold poetry readings at now V. Y. Kantak Seminar Room. Many students from different faculty and at times people who had interest in poetry from outside Campus used to attend readings. While in an informal discussions over cups of tea I used to think about Making A Poem then . Discussed theories of poetry. On act of writing. Creative writing. Nothing helped. But If you are still planning to construct a theory for making a poem and which would be accountable to answer the mysterious process involved, you can come close to an extent but never precisely where you wish to be. For instance, if you analyze any poem ruthlessly just to study that creative process that go with it, what you get is ninety percent of the truth. The tenth part, vital in making your oeuvre; will be left unanalyzed like an unknown element in your creative work.

Once I made up my mind to face this challenge and provide the methodology of making a poem. I found it beyond my competence. I finally decided to express my response through poetry. Making a poem became a bug with me until I could not keep it with myself. I then took the pen and started Making A Poem on the art of making a poem. My personal poetic response to the act of making a poem.

MAKING A POEM

To write a poem the pen
has to slide making a line

over a sheet. You see a
snake uncoil. Words bare

themselves. You come to know
what nakedness is or does.

Manaka's charm works as a
rule. A Sage needs senses.

In this episode the pen runs
out of ink, Refill. The sound

of music resonates. Sheets flap.
The dance of the black ink and

A little light. A poem is made.

VB : Tell us something about your Gujarati anthology of poetry, *Jeevaangeet*.

VN : My collection *Jeevangeet* is similar in experiments with my collection, *City Times* . I did experiments with language, my mother tongue which being Gujarati. I discovered that it is matter of language, the medium and it is at times matter of choice. But you see language carries tradition and culture with it. It was published by Navbharat Sahitya Mandir (Ahmedabad/ Mumbai) in 2001 in AiD for Gujarat

Earthquake victims of 26th January , 2001 and dedicated to thousands of men , women and children who lost their lives and homes in Earthquake..

VB : Do you indulge in translation of poetry ?

VN : I started with translating Gujarati language poetry into English. Some of the Gujarati poets I translated are Ravji Patel who died young with whom, in fact, the modern Gujarati poetry begins, and then Niranjan Bhagat who is significant modern Gujarati poet. We used to sit together and he used to give his inputs. I was fortunate to have feedback and some punch lines altered by him at his residence at Ashram Road residence in Ahmedabad. Later I did translate my own Gujarati language poetry included in Jeevangeet into English which appeared in Kavya Bharti from Madhurai. But, you see, a lot needs to be done in this area of translation.

VB : What are you more comfortable with; writing in Gujarati or in English?

VN : I am comfortable with both, Gujarati as well as English. It is a matter of choice which language you pick up to express your art in literary form. Though there theories and debates about languages. But I am primarily not a scholar but a practicing poet. One can evaluate where one is better. If you can write in your vernacular or mother tongue and not better in other language than one should not sacrifice poetry to other language. That one has to judge for oneself.

VB : How do you look at your anthology *Poetry Manifesto*?

VN : My *Poetry Manifesto (New & Selected Poems)* is an effort of my twenty and odd years of poetry in English collected as selected work.. I believed one should write poems without bothering about the why , the how and the what of poetry. It carries a simple thought of putting your thought and feelings fused in poetic form without bothering about the why , the what and how of the craft of poetry writing. Once you read the poem *Poetry Manifesto* you will get the hang of

whole Poetry Manifesto, of course, personal. You see, titles are often misleading. The collection is not intended to be my political agenda.

About the Poet :

Vihang A. Naik was born in Surat, Gujarat on September 2, 1969. He is Indian poetry writing in English and translates Gujarati language poetry into English. His English language poems have appeared in literary journals such as: Indian Literature : A Sahitya Akademi Bi-Monthly Journal , Kavya Bharati , POESIS : A Journal of Poetry Circle , Mumbai , The Journal of The Poetry Society (India) , The Journal of Indian Writing In English , The Journal of Literature and Aesthetics , The Brown Critique ,The Poetry Chain among other significant journals. He is educated from The M.S. University of Baroda with Philosophy , Indian and English Literature . He had his primary schooling from Navrachana School of Baroda ,Gujarat .

His significant collection of poems *Poetry Manifesto (New & Selected Poems)* is published by IndiaLog Publications Pvt Ltd (New Delhi) in 2010. His collection of poems include *Making A Poem* published by Allied Publishers' (Mumbai) in 2004 . His first collection of poems includes *City Times and Other Poems* published in 1993.

His Gujarati collection of poems include *Jeevangeet (Gujarati Poems)* published by Navbharat Sahitya Mandir (Ahmedabad) in 2001 dedicated to the cause of victims of Gujarat Earthquake 26th January , 2001 . He also translates poetry written in Gujarati language into English including his own Gujarati Language poems into English.

He taught English at Colleges affiliated to Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University , Patan . First at Smt. Desai Arts and Commerce College during 1996-67. He now teaches English at Shree Ambaji Arts College , North Gujarat, India since July, 1997.

His literary info can be found at website <http://www.vihang.org>