

Classic Poetry Series

**Vasant Abaji Dahake**  
**- poems -**

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## Vasant Abaji Dahake(30 March 1942 -)

Vasant Abaji Dahake is a well-known Marathi poet, playwright, novelist, essayist, short story writer, artist, and critic from Amaravati district in the Maharashtra state of India. He is awarded Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection 'Chitralipi' for the year 2009.

His first collection of poems, *Yogabhrashta* (1972), instantly established him as a successor to the early modernists in Marathi literature such as Mardhekar, [P.S. Rege](http://www.poemhunter.com/purushottam-shivaram-rege/) and [Vinda Karandikar](http://www.poemhunter.com/vinda-karandikar/).

Taut, complex, richly metaphorical, and yet by no means apolitical, Dahake's work – informed as it is both by decidedly regional and unapologetically international influences – has been marginalised by the more nativist forces of the Marathi literary mainstream.

Writes noted poet and critic [Ranjit Hoskote](http://www.poemhunter.com/ranjit-hoskote/) of his work: "Vasant Abaji Dahake's poems reverberate with the clash of opposites: they speak of the displacement of a solitary consciousness from the countryside to the metropolis, from the expansiveness of landscape to the constrictions of architecture, and the anxieties and the exhilarations that such a traumatic experience can produce." [Hoskote](http://www.poemhunter.com/ranjit-hoskote/) locates Dahake as a poet who entered adulthood in the 1960s – the era of [Che Guevara](http://www.poemhunter.com/ernesto-che-guevara/) and the Beatles, also characterised more specifically by a young nation's growing disenchantment with the realities of the post-Independence landscape.

In 1992, [Ranjit Hoskote](http://www.poemhunter.com/ranjit-hoskote/) and Mangesh Kulkarni translated Dahake's first book, *Yogabhrashta*, in a volume called *A Terrorist of the Spirit*. This made accessible to a wider readership a poetic voice of many resonances. This was a poetry that could speak of the impulse to "read the astrology column furtively/ when no one's looking", as well as register a note of political and moral dissent when evoking "legislators' lying arguments/ that scratch in the same old groove,/ playing out the same old tunes/ from the capitalist jukebox".

It was a poetry that could speak of the private terror of being "caged in our separate solitudes" under a "terrifyingly empty sky" but could also savagely

denounce an entire system: "A generation: its shoulders stunted under the weight/ of a ditchwater system; on whose dwarf heads,/ wartlike, aimless universities sprout;/ squalid slums of the mind . . ."

[Ranjit Hoskote](http://www.poemhunter.com/ranjit-hoskote/) revisited Yogabhrashta recently. In this first Indian edition of PIW, he shares some of his new translations of that compelling book. Also included here is his essay on Dahake's literary and cultural context and contribution.

His writings show an influence of existentialist writers like [Kafka](http://www.poemhunter.com/franz-kafka/). His poetry is often dark and provocative.

He is associated with the Little Magazine Movement in Marathi during the mid-fifties and the sixties.

Dahake is married to Prabha Ganorkar (????? ??????), also a writer.

He also has a son Ritwik who is married to Tahira Thekaekara and a daughter Rahee.

# Afternoon

This is a complete afternoon:  
a thousand shards of solitude.  
I count  
I match  
I shape  
I join.  
These are my naked hands  
on a naked, sad table.  
I try to hold this instant,  
this completely desiccated fragment of time.  
My eyes are blank wide open.  
I sense the harsh madman touch  
of solitude.  
A crazed lonely white sun  
is hanging  
in the white sky.

[Translated By Ranjit Hoskote]

Vasant Abaji Dahake

# Amitabh Bachchan

Holding my six-year old daughter's hand  
I watch your screen-stirring presence, laughter, dance and song.  
Watch you talk and act rebellious in the face of this life.  
I don't particularly like this life either.  
And I've now sheathed that dislike.  
This is what I keep sensing: through the screen she has smoothly  
entered your world, the way you operate smoothly  
in enemy territory, and of late I often find myself  
in a seat at the theatre,  
holding the rusty sheath in my hands.  
At times you act for a moment, only for a moment in a way that could  
trigger a tremulous remembrance of my generation's watchwords.  
Before me, tomorrow's generation is mouthing your lines  
even before you've moved your lips.  
As if you were a reaper sure to gather  
the first harvest of tomorrow's generation on your threshing-floor.  
When my daughter grieves  
at turns in the plot that threaten your life,  
my words of solace have the ring  
of a reality beyond her grasp.  
They are quite pointless, actually.  
She pulls herself together in a while  
— the way she'll often have to do in the future;  
and you'd have been left far behind by then.

[Translated from 'Shubhavartaman', a collection of poems, by Mangesh Kulkarni]

Vasant Abaji Dahake

# Bogeyman

One more bogeyman  
flaps on a calendar, bragging.  
They're all prisoners of hope, shoulders  
sagging in the present, lips festooned  
with platitudes;  
the loose change of their lives  
rings on the floor, rolls away.

These treacherous seasons of ecstasy  
go striding like colossi  
across my torpid body.

[Translated by Ranjit Hoskote]

Vasant Abaji Dahake

# Eyes

A night like opium  
when the moonlight moans through the water,  
that's how your eyes

brim over my face.

[Translated by Ranjit Hoskote]

Vasant Abaji Dahake

# Moon

Like a wild bull the moon  
charges headlong  
through green unearthly thickets.  
Sharp-teeth-torn, the water  
shivers all night.

All night  
a broadsword strokes,  
from base to nape, the spine.

[Translated by Ranjit Hoskote]

Vasant Abaji Dahake

# My Burning Chest

On my burning chest I suffer the monsoon's first showers,  
across the film of blood on my eyes a blue light spreads  
and in my flesh-marrow-skin the black birds flash  
their emerald wings.

Vasant Abaji Dahake

# On A Rocky Tree

On a rocky tree a mynah,  
on a rocky road a steamroller,  
the white-hot afternoon  
setting a bronze bust on fire.

A handsome stallion bred from steel  
keeps galloping across an endless plain,  
arrested by his bridle.

[Translated by Ranjit Hoskote]

Vasant Abaji Dahake

# Petals

One by one, we left the black-shadow cities behind  
and yet I've seen the gutter-yellow eyeballs  
of high towers fixed on you.  
And as we walked these unknown roads, my unholy ears  
have heard, bubbling inside you, a shameless aria of lust.  
And I've felt the roses in my chest  
wither, dropping their petals one by one.

[Translated by Ranjit Hoskote]

Vasant Abaji Dahake

# Roads

Now I've filled my lungs with cold darkness  
and my eyes are unpeopled roads.  
My ascetic feet have given up these cities  
with their domestic nests, and moved on.

This path doesn't lead me to you  
and if I wander dejected,  
it isn't for you.

Now if these feet go on walking  
it's only because the roads stretch out;  
and where the roads are meant to go,  
I've forgotten.

[Translated by Ranjit Hoskote]

Vasant Abaji Dahake

# Superman In A Jar

In the see-through jar of this century,  
you see preserved  
a Larger-than-Life Figure.  
A row of jars, a Great One in each.  
The character of each as pure, as unsullied  
as a virgin's gaze,  
the lines on the upraised hands of each  
tracing a harmonious road-map to peace.  
All you who sorrow, all you who suffer,  
come bathe yourselves in the vision of these supermen.

Please maintain silence.  
Please do not spit.

A boundless crowd gathers  
for a glimpse of the Great Ones in their jars,  
the kind of crowd that goes to watch parrots  
in their cages, or stares at bedraggled circus bears,  
those same heavy, cold, silent people,  
those restless, anxious, violent people  
chew, with their wide-open eyes,  
yet another superman.

I'm one of those supermen in their jars.

Around me, these airtight, see-through ramparts,  
Impregnable walls.  
I suffocate,  
I thrash about,  
gnawing away at myself,  
turning, restless, in this glass jar.

The dumb curator of this museum  
has just vanished.

[Translated by Ranjit Hoskote]

Vasant Abaji Dahake

# The Fine Grain Of My Days

Through this evening's window,  
through tranquil eyes I watch  
on the far road a scene of slaughter:  
each day gathered up to be winnowed.  
Here's the fine grain of my days,  
the wind-tossed, gentle chaff.

[Translated by Ranjit Hoskote]

Vasant Abaji Dahake

# The Hare Chase

Staves batter my dreams  
and I wake up,  
wiping oaths from my face.

So this ripped-apart morning  
and the scheming night before  
and the turncoat day before it:

they watch, stone-eyed,  
as I'm roasted, a hare on a spit.

[Translated by Ranjit Hoskote]

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# Thirst

Thirst

thighs loins breast throat

thirst

from out the eyes

thirst

arms

paws

thirst

from out the call

thirst

in this parched forest

alone

[Translated by Ranjit Hoskote]

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# Tree

No mortal tree, you will keep growing  
inside me,  
branching in my veins.  
Inside me I hear  
the rustling of your leaves.

[Translated by Ranjit Hoskote]

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