

## **ONE**

They let me know in time for me to buy.  
I would do anything for Amitabh,  
even buy that!  
Showing me this AD  
means business.  
I can't ever have a car or  
more than one mobile phone,  
Barista would be nice and cool,  
traffic junctions are a conspiracy.

## **TWO**

**H**e wants me to stay. I drive around, I dislike  
his voice, present everywhere. His arms  
stretched to relieve me  
of all claims to loneliness,  
he wants to invite me  
to a life of bent spoons,  
bent spoons, telepathy, black magic.  
I run away, I keep running away.  
On the fourth floor,  
I can ring a bell, sit on a sofa  
wait for the day to be over.

### **THREE**

**H**e shows me  
how his car  
outshines my old scooter.  
He shows me how her armpits  
do the selling,  
he says - "lose yourself in me,  
hide your logic." I merely sling on irony.

## **FOUR**

**H**s camel cart  
does the talking today.  
He says people are enjoying  
his new campaigns.  
No one minds, he says  
no one minds.  
He says this city is  
a participating market.  
I dance for him, I listen to him,  
I love this city, its abandon.  
I ask him for some time  
to drive out to Sarkhej.  
He says he has to hardsell telecom.  
He says, he wants to buy a sofa-set.

## **FIVE**

I go for a walk.  
He says, "look at the sky,  
I have emptied it or you."  
I wear pink, he offers me blues, and greens.  
Somewhere in our courtship  
a bouquet will appear.

## **SIX**

**H**e says this wall  
cannot speak,  
he says temples don't understand  
market-speak.  
He says, temples  
hide from the city.  
He says, temples should  
have computer games.  
I say, I like the sun in his hair.  
He says, computer games have divinity  
anyone can win.

## **SEVEN**

Manav Mandir is neither prudish  
nor conservative, he says.  
The temple prays for Amaron batteries,  
time's coaching classes for CAT  
and some property -dealer.  
Prayers don't cost money.  
He says Manav Mandir  
unfurls saffron flags on each  
festival day,  
bhajans ring out in a chorus,  
the priests invite him, especially.  
I feel safe with him, his faith  
in the right place. Any temple which will pray  
in the open market, will always remain.

## **EIGHT**

**H**e said the road to heaven  
is paved with good hospitals,  
transparent as glass , pricey  
and, as such, for tourists only.  
He never wanted glow-signs, blow-ups, hoardings  
to have back-sides, he wanted the whole city  
electrifi ed with the gold dust  
of advertisements.  
But, he says, he has to share power,  
he doesn't like to share me,  
he comes home to pick me up,  
he gets me a private number, to reach me.



## **NINE**

**S**omewhere else the sun shines,  
here the sun searches  
for customers. He says  
the sky searches for  
eyeballs, streets  
search for voices  
He says if we go straight  
down this road  
reach the highway,  
we can strip ourselves  
of urbanity.  
He says, cities are made  
to be driven out of.

## TEN

He doesn't say it  
but it is obvious;  
disease spreads  
in the spaces  
around the hospitals.  
And the hospitals  
act as a net  
and let no one fall.  
He says, hawkers and  
small-time cooks have  
failed to capture the culinary  
imagination of our bellies.  
He says, Tirupati oil is as bad as any, but  
they have good models, good money - they can buy hospitals.

## **ELEVEN**

All at once  
everyone speaks,  
nothing is clear,  
most things are smudged.  
Standing at the crossroads,  
a little song could sound like  
a siren, an engine, cycle bells.  
He says, at a crossroads  
everyone is in a hurry  
to reach the next crossroad,  
if there were no red-lights  
there would be no money in keeping head-counts  
there would be no breath in cities,  
hope would be a forgotten idea.

## **TWELVE**

**H**ow can they be sure  
that we only look upwards at  $45^\circ$  ?  
I don't know if I can generalize  
may I?

He says, this city is made for moving in one  
direction at a time.

## **THIRTEEN**

Neem trees, chrome green  
leaves, yellow and black of  
auto-rickshaws seems pale  
compared to the brick red  
and flowerpot LIM.  
He says, LIM didn't offer its walls  
to stick ads,  
it is an encroachment.  
But it gets the customers in  
and gets the money in.  
So, its OK.  
MBA's would not go pulling banners down  
anyway. They would understand,  
they are valuable.

## **FOURTEEN**

I was walking home  
camera in hand,  
brown-skin, orange-shirt;  
he waves at me,  
calls out - "click me!"  
Our eyes did not meet,  
how did we communicate?  
With our hands and legs - I clicked  
I walked away.  
He says,  
this hoarding needs fixing.  
It needs halogens,  
it needs to fetch more money.  
He says,  
these hoardings have to be well-lit iron-walls  
even in the dead of night.  
When no one's there,  
one still has to sell tea.

## **FIFTEEN**

Three headed,  
an ill-balanced trinity of tin,  
colour wheel,  
blue, brown, white.  
Today, these hoardings innocently  
reflect the sky,  
as I cycle by, I glance the  
texture the waves on its surface.  
He says,  
before a child is named,  
she can be called anything.  
So, I dream of words floating in  
photographs of exile.

## **SIXTEEN**

Cattle-rearing, this city is an encroachment.  
Tar all over fertile-land  
party-plots and sand.  
The blind-school puts up  
calls to worthwhile charity,  
Tata Indicom pretends to play pool.  
He says, this city is growing,  
this city is growing.  
this circle used to be good  
for traffic jams, now no more.  
He says, this city is learning new tricks  
everyday.  
Faster than the traffic lights  
faster than the monsoon clouds, flying away.



## **SEVENTEEN**

**G**olden sleeve  
of this urban jacket,  
rarely does anything sunny  
look beautiful, not hot.  
*Sardar* complex has rented each  
board on the plaza to Tata Indicom,  
does it look like that  
from a distance?  
From a distance,  
all flats look empty.  
He says he feels nice about  
the way Vastrapur has developed,  
land is more pricey than food grains,  
he likes the way it has become  
a public private sweepstake.

## **EIGHTEEN**

Crossing a street  
with national brands  
burning in the background.  
People say Ahmedabadis are rowdy,  
uncultured, numb-fingered  
cash counters.  
Why wouldn't they be?  
They have flown from a city of  
vision to an urban  
town-planners misspelled fantasy.  
From history to disconnection,  
from farming to STD booths and NGOs.  
Ahmedabad has lost her villages...  
He says a megacity is a megacity is a megacity.

## **NINETEEN**

**P**arked scooters  
communicate for their masters,  
a shadow, jet-black on-the-pavement  
the garden green and re-built,  
Vastrapur lake has been a swamp  
now it is swank  
and there are no traces  
of the past.  
Scooter-ads cost only Rs. 8./ad  
and can be put up surreptitiously.  
He says, he knows all the traders  
in the city, what they sell, for how much -  
thanks to getting stuck in traffic-jams.  
He says, everything serves a purpose,  
advertisements are the newspapers  
of a consuming city.

## **TWENTY**

Shree Asharam Ashram,  
in Ahmedabad  
puts up posters,  
all over town  
when Asharam comes to Ahmedabad.  
Asharamji looks at you with peace,  
joy, contemplation.  
I know every time he is here.  
He says, gurus are good  
for a city's economy.

## **TWENTY-ONE**

Strands of pan-masala, gutkha  
posters of bac-free,  
packaged drinking water.

Bottles with red lids,  
cream-rolls, biscuits, rupee-chocolates  
next to a petrol-pump.

The petrol pump provides free air  
the panwalla offers a dust-bin.

He says, it doesn't matter  
that the city provides no drinking water -  
there is enough bac-free.

Everyone is willing to pay!

he says, its time everything free became cheap (instead),  
its fun to collect bills  
and its fun to collect bills.

## **TWENTY-TWO**

**F**ist in the air  
stone wall of silence  
a tree by the lake.

AUDA has been widely praised  
for the way it has taken hold  
of the city of Vastrapur  
each flower has a name;  
each time I turn my head,  
I have a different preposition  
to accommodate.

He says, traders need to breathe,  
its an environmental issue.

He says - by the temple, by the lake  
credos don't change, occupations don't change  
they only appear to.

## **TWENTY-THREE**

When I went searching for hoardings  
I thought, buses are the perfect bait,  
they move, they sell, they come late.  
Buses move slowly  
because they are old,  
there is too much traffic,  
and it's not safe.  
They move slow, so  
ads on the back  
are thrust in your face  
optimally. He says, originally it was  
a side-income. But now it earns them  
more than selling tickets, day after day,  
It helps keep things cheap...  
enough, to seem democratic.  
It's the price we have to pay.

## **TWENTY-FOUR**

Fun Republic corner,  
you'd think they dance there.  
They show movies.  
Head-lights like tail-spins  
they sell oil, they sell phones, they sell directions.  
People walk into view,  
you appear to study them  
bedsheets sell as cover-ups  
dominoes used to be a game.  
He says, Fun Republic has been economic plaster  
for the city's bones.  
Show us, what we are afraid of.



## **TWENTY-FIVE**

Motorcycles were never see-through  
but if things barge into you  
constantly, you constantly  
have accidents with apparitions.  
Your attention is being sold...  
things happen.  
He must be a 20 something  
passing by fun-republic  
coming back from work  
who had to steal a glance.  
He says, cloth banners  
dress our poor powdered streets.

## **TWENTY-SIX**

**S**tanding frozen on the street  
or photographed.

These cars go about the city  
swallowing bait,  
raising no objections.

I had 20 post-its on my wall  
and each spoke of a new idea.

I was perpetually stuck on far-strung  
hanging shops in the sky:  
what does it mean?

It means our cities are poor  
they can't afford policies

it means there is nothing worth preserving here.

He says, the municipality needs money  
to spend on shoddy makeshift roads,  
on pretty brochures,  
can't we spare a glance for our city.

## **TWENTY-SEVEN**

**K**ishore Kumar has passed away  
into the generation gap,  
a testament to mass production.  
McDonald's now invites everyone,  
why would I wait in queue to get a handful  
of fried potatoes?  
McDonald's feels charitable  
in this dry weather  
At dusk the violet sky;  
He says, he likes McDonald's low prices  
he doesn't like the rush  
the noise,  
the craze, the addictive taste.  
He says, Americans will always misrepresent India  
aim below the belt,  
try to squeeze us out.  
He says, no McDonald's is ever pretty.

## **TWENTY-EIGHT**

**D**iscussing simple matters  
under gateways of great offer;  
a closed-shop leaves a  
sales-pitch out to get wet.  
Yellow stairs, palm leaves,  
remnant motorcycles.  
Baskin-Robbins is too expensive  
to sit and start forgetting everything.  
They have small tables, stupid chairs.  
Bordering with Havmour,  
there's enough competition.  
He says, there should be a civic hygiene policy,  
a civic advertising policy.  
He says, this city doesn't remind one of anything  
it is a barrage of steel and stone  
brick and mortar bridges,  
which fall in the rain.

## **TWENTY-NINE**

**H**awkers and salesmen are possessive of their territories. Here, Tata Indicom captures a colony by offering a free signboard. "No hawkers and salesmen allowed." What if, it is a Tata salesman? A signboard cannot stop an army of paid-by percentage operators. Guards sit idle. Everyone wearing a tie might not be selling aquaguard. Bare brick structures are a part of Ahmedabad, decidedly. Spare stone, would-be pavements are a part of Ahmedabad. He says, 'door-to-door' sales is not a bad idea. But you always catch everyone in a bad mood. No one sells anything.

## **THIRTY**

Hutch takes over a building  
and a street full of lampposts.  
Hutch takes over the market  
at Premchand Nagar crossroads.  
No one minds Hutch,  
Hutch makes amusing ads,  
Hutch sends beautiful bills,  
no one minds paying Hutch.  
In this building on the 9th floor,  
VSNL has a billing office  
for broadband customers.  
He says Hutch has connected  
all of Gujarat.  
He says, the stark white sky  
is also Hutch's doing;  
suspended in a  
remarkable symphony,  
Hutch has a sweet face.  
expensive lace  
lines the roads.

## **THIRTY-ONE**

Autorickshaws pass by now  
focus didn't help,  
a devaluation of surroundings  
didn't help.  
Ajay Devgan opened here  
silhouettes in the sun.  
In 2000 Fun Republic drove Roopali  
out of business.  
Roopali sits still by Nehru bridge  
nothing more to show.  
This is an empty frame.  
He walks with me  
in the rain,  
he takes me to a movie  
we glide up escalators  
get bored at intervals  
200-full feels like house-full  
the applause is numb.  
He says, Saturdays  
are lively again,  
in Ahmedabad.  
Ghosts have more space to run  
a place they call home.  
He says, Roopalee has the distinction  
of being a witness  
to the world changing a city

into an old grey metro,  
being aware of histories  
having turned to white dust.  
He says, this city has too many  
gates taking nowhere to nowhere,  
doors standing free of walls.



## **THIRTY-TWO**

Looking out  
why would anyone cross the street,  
which goes nowhere.  
Bright hoardings  
look on at a dry river.  
A walled city with no walls.  
They said the city needs to grow,  
this city needs to grow.  
Where will the clothes  
hang to dry  
when it rains everywhere,  
everywhere.  
He says, this city burns with a fever  
it plugs away at the seams,  
the plan is all wrong.  
The old walls still remain  
steel sheets dance in the mind.

### **THIRTY-THREE**

On what's left of the old threads  
of Ahmed Shah's City,  
we dry clothes on them.  
Mostly white,  
some black scarves,  
some black scarves.  
Everything is displaced in June,  
the dry Sabarmati fills over  
hoardings still search for ads  
grass and neem trees,  
limping back to life in the 90s  
ambition got the better of us.  
He says,  
this bridge will go down  
straight into the centre.  
We will beat around the bush.

## **THIRTY-FOUR**

The renovated darwajo  
Dilli Darwaja, down the road from Mirzapur  
It feels abstract,  
walking through a door  
when the walls have been blown apart  
by a city growing faster than  
a child's question bank.  
He says, the renovation did not work  
portions were left  
incomplete.  
The wooden door remains, appears to be  
300 years old.  
Imagine a bigger procession  
passing through,  
imagine the city walls still being there,  
time standing still at the city's edge.

## **THIRTY-FIVE**

Selling milk under the gate  
Kitchen Express offers pickle  
stone claps, red name plate.  
This is a catalogue,  
yellow banners which mean nothing from a distance...  
"sticking posters on this monument is prohibited"  
but posters have been stuck;  
in every photograph  
posters share monumental space.  
He says,  
we cannot think about these things  
too much.  
History stands in the middle of the road,  
can the world change  
for a gate with no purpose?

## **THIRTY-SIX**

Some stay  
some move.  
Tirupati's at it again,  
Siddi Sayed mosque  
inspiration behind IIM-A's logo  
Neem trees, dream schemes.  
No ads for CAT exams here,  
Pareks - the original mall, still stands.  
These roads are tired,  
everyone is moving away.  
He says, Ahmedabad started somewhere here  
and then the story slipped out.  
Now, Muslims search for space,  
mosques are historical.  
No Taj here,  
buildings  
which look appropriate  
in the heat.

## **THIRTY-SEVEN**

A historic sales-pitch  
frozen in stone.  
This one-way road  
takes you to Dilli Darwaja.  
It's impossible to know where you are  
in which time,  
centuries alternate, dynasties alternate  
love and hate.  
In that sense  
nothing can disappear  
everything leaves a trace  
traces accumulate and make cities  
municipalities.  
He says, in summer this city's  
wind tunnels  
behave like  
sympathetic friends.  
Kota stone, wooden roof  
balconies which won't  
take no weight.

## **THIRTY-EIGHT**

A special oil  
for rickshaws,  
a street which encircles  
the bus-route...  
People here are amazingly silent.  
This place has structure,  
pavements,  
Castrol.  
He says, Mirzapur was once  
an address.  
Now it is on the way.  
My old school is around the corner  
this is the small patch of land,  
where I often stood with my friends, after school.

## **THIRTY-NINE**

**B**arely in the frame,  
they live neither in Khadia  
nor on the relief road.  
Kavi Dalpatram Chowk  
is a renovated heritage monument.  
I presume, they live there.  
At Dalpatram Chowk, every window  
faces the other.  
It is a neighbourhood.  
A friend from Mumbai  
took me there.  
I fought with her,  
she said, everybody hates strangers,  
but some strangers know their way.



## **FORIY**

**P**igeons scampering  
after grain.

The wall  
sprouting again,  
Ahmedabad has gone  
from walls to malls  
in fi ve years.

From Marutis and Premiere Padminis  
to Honda two-wheelers rushing past,  
from bad connections to wireless networks.

The sun is selective,  
this street wears many shades  
of grey.

To close the door and get away  
is nearly impossible.

Wind can knock your door  
you can step out to pigeon shit.

This city can  
turn your mind  
in funny directions.

## **FORTY-ONE**

Some walls aren't flat  
they have footholds,  
they have levels,  
they have tunnels.  
TVS hasn't counted past  
10 lakhs in three months,  
horseride, camelride, bikeride  
a huge curve,  
a submarine.  
he says, West-Ahmedabad  
has enough space,  
it needs no walls.  
But money needs iron bars.  
The bridge, being a traffic sign.

## **FORTY-TWO**

The same bird  
flapping wings  
across the frame.

This view is a compilation.

"Don't start what you can't finish", is it?

He says, he signs his name  
with a ball-point pen.

He says,  
he understands the joy  
of flying, of living again.

## **FORTY-THREE**

From the cricket ground  
to driving a motorcycle,  
flowers across the divider.  
Cricketers wear caps  
and fielders pick on grass  
waiting for a hit in their direction.  
Scaffolding standing tall  
a lamppost  
waiting for the night.  
Looking at this picture,  
could one say  
when  
Ahmedabad takes a break?  
No. He says.  
Businessmen take a break  
when there is no money left  
to count.

## **FORTY-FOUR**

Magnetic eyes  
school boys  
Aamir Khan  
quiz-with-no-prize  
at-the-end.  
Ahmedabad doesn't treat  
its walls well.  
She will come back home at night  
and say,  
she is tired  
of living behind  
closed doors.  
She will sing a song  
I will stare at her,  
guiltless.

## **FORTY-FIVE**

**D**on't want to waste your time  
watching TV?

Go snuggle among trees  
and sell biscuits.

Everyone is troubled,  
First paint a wall white,  
then make sure  
at least 25 people look at it.

You are ready  
to earn some money.

Somebody will want to  
paint *Nescafe*, *Coke* here  
leave the wall peeping,  
spying on you;  
day after day.

Don't want to waste your time  
watching TV?

Clean the shrubs  
brush away the dust  
prepare to look away.

## **FORTY-SIX**

A space ship  
in spotlight  
bunches of leaves  
in clarity.  
Innocent sky  
wires walking over;  
She has disappeared  
from the landscape,  
she has punctured  
all expectations  
all speech balloons.  
He says,  
tax payers protect  
tax payers protect  
tax payers.  
Everyone else merely  
interprets  
the meanings of  
welfare.

## **FORTY-SEVEN**

This temple, off CG Road  
is pretty popular,  
when street corners  
experience spiritual awakening  
it is amazing...  
Neem trees again.  
Summer pillion riding,  
saffron street receding  
into the distance.  
He says,  
the bark of young trees  
has nothing to say.



## **FORTY-EIGHT**

**BSNL.** Blue, open and high  
a national connection,  
bookings open  
long welcoming waiting lines.  
Searching for a way  
to combine  
budget with ambition?  
You are at the right place.  
Reliance is a choice  
conditions apply,  
beware - companies multiply...  
New malls  
open every minute.  
Who-all will shop  
till they drop?  
Be one among 20 million customers,  
unknown if not anonymous.

## **FORTY-NINE**

Advertising has no shelf life  
no historian  
no collector,  
no champion.  
Remembering  
what made us buy  
is not very pleasant.