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Abstract

V. S. Naipaul was born in Chaguanas in Trinidad on 17th August 1932. His grandparents emigrated from India in the 1880's to work as indentured labourers in Trinidad's sugar plantations. Naipaul's father took up the career as an English-language journalist in the Peasant Indian immigrant community in Trinidad. Naipaul talks about his father's veneration for writers and how that inspired him to become a writer (from "A Prologue to an Autobiography", 1983). Though they traced their roots as the descendants of Hindu Brahmins, yet they retracted from observing many of the rituals and practices common to Brahmins in India. The family gradually started using English as their primary language, moving away from Indian languages.

Naipaul began to travel in early 1960's when he was drawn to places where he hoped to gain knowledge about his own history as a displaced Indian and a colonial subject. He experienced India, his ancestral homeland as a place of absolute chaos. His argument was that the Indians have turned "headless" because of the Islamic Mughal conquests and colonial suppression. According to him the desolated old Hindu temples not only expressed the defeat but also a lost confidence and royalty. While on the other hand the Muslim Indians, being the converts were deplored from themselves and their deep past. Such views put Naipaul in the category of an 'orientalist', therefore reiterating his sense of indignation and diasporic nostalgia. Many of his feelings about India are rooted in his family background – his grandfather, a Brahmin from Uttar Pradesh in India, came to Trinidad as an indentured labourer, which he expresses in his trilogy of books on India. This paper will analyse the trilogy and trace the trajectory of opinions on India as expressed by Naipaul.

The trilogy showcases Naipaul's fears, as he once said, of "being swallowed up by the bush", by the "enemies of the civilization" he so admires. In one of his early essays he writes about India, "for which one has a great tenderness, but from which at length one always wishes to separate oneself." The first book in this trilogy is "*An Area of Darkness*" (1964), where we observe that Naipaul is not able to identify himself with the land of his forefathers because of his western-educated consciousness which separates him from India. As a result, India seems to be his radical "other". But one should also look at the other side of the text which shows that Naipaul has tried to negotiate with the spatial "otherness" of India.

At the beginning of the text there is a sense of uneasiness that Naipaul feels while drawing towards India. His childhood dreams of Indian myths and history emerged as nostalgic disturbing memories in contradiction to his education in London. There is a clash in longing for 'difference' and the knowledge for 'sameness'. The 'Indianness' that he was expecting to connect with made him turn towards aloofness in terms of race, religion and cultural identity.

At one instance in the text during the narrator's brief stay at Kashmir, we observe a productive aspect of a migrant's vision. Naipaul is seeking a greater clarity of vision and a certain tolerance by Indians in providing a proper recognition to their violent and complex history which consists of a series of colonial conquests, the first one being the Aryan victory over the Dravidians. The cultural memory of different local communities have been successful in preserving the various elements within a common history. Naipaul sees this in respect of the folk culture linked with the Hazratbal Mosque at Kashmir, but also constituted in the physical space of the nation. Such pluralist view of Naipaul about history can be seen as closer to the notion of "cultural hybridity" by Homi K. Bhabha.

There seems a dramatization of Naipaul's efforts to understand the contemporary importance of his long abandoned 'homeland' and simultaneously a painful realization of an impossible 'going home' project. Regarding this Suvir Kaul has provided his opinions in "*An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*":

"...here are burdens Naipaul brought to India when he visited it in 1962; added to them was the special weight of his cultural inheritance, his sense that the Indian aspect of his Trinidadian sensibility could be explained, or discovered perhaps in some form of ordinaryplentitude, in the land of his maternal grandfather."

The "India" of "*An Area of Darkness*" is an important aspect in providing a platform for the self-exploration which will turn into Naipaul's development as a diasporic writer in the coming years. These years of self-invention provided him with a new identity and a new perspective, which in turn sowed the seeds of interest in Naipaul regarding emerging political issues of the post-imperial global scenario. One of the important issues among these was that of the nation building and fraternity with the decolonization process.

Like the first one, the second book, "*India: A Wounded Civilization*" is also a travelogue written during his second visit to India in 1975. After his loss of belongingness to India in the first book, now he observes Indian culture, religion, art and science more closely. The key aspects to the texts can be picked up in the "foreword" by Naipaul when he talks about his "Indian memories"- the family customs which he saw as a child were gradually dismissed and forgotten as he grew up, according to him they are "like trap doors into a bottomless past". His view is manifestation of modernist and anti-traditionalist critic, when he sees Hinduism as an

ideology of self-destruction and calls 'karma' as the "Hindu killer". There is inability to indulge into social enquiry, therefore the real India remains unknown to Indians. He is of the belief that Indians have been living as conquered people since a very long time, as a consequence they are in a state of parasitic intellectuality on other civilizations. Naipaul observes a lack of intellectual growth which has paved way through the entire social organization.

He also dwells into psychoanalytic theory in order to understand Indian mind-set. According to him the ego of an Indian individual remains underdeveloped as one's behaviour is constantly regulated by the society, every detail of daily life is circumscribed by a social perception rather than an individual function. This book presents us with Naipaul's critique of Indian nationalist politics as a failure in coming to terms with post-independence "modernity", specific to Indian nationhood. Naipaul has treated the subjects distantly by presenting them merely as facts. He believes that India needs a way to break from its orthodox patterns and the western borrowed institutions such as the judiciary and the constitution, which will not be a success in this country. India requires institutions based on its own value system. For Naipaul, an ancient civilization like India should have advanced quickly rather than becoming more and more archaic. And the reason for such consequences are the constant invasions in past thousand years. There is now a broken tradition and a creative loss, visible in Indian paintings, cinema, music and architecture.

In the last book of the trilogy, "*India: A Million Mutinies Now*", Naipaul is able to culminate a sense of compensation by the satisfaction he feels in seeing the economic growth in India. This development has emancipated millions of Indians as equivalent to the Mutiny of 1857 by analogy. In Naipaul's view the domination of British during the colonial rule turned Indians into slaves. Even after independence Indians have not developed their independent ideology. There is a lack of political awareness, determination and political will. Projecting a scenario of neo-colonialism, Naipaul says "what was true of Bombay was true of other parts of India as well; of the state of Andhra, of Tamil Nadu, Assam, the Punjabi all over India scores of particularities that has been frozen by foreign rule, or by poverty or lack of opportunity or abjectness, had begun to flow again".

In his view Indians have turned weak because of centuries of subjection by colonial rule. They were relying on the false notion that the culture would remain unaffected irrespective of who ruled the nation. "The country was run on principles that assumed that kings would change; the case would be fought, out that society would go on, pretty much undisturbed by those events." Naipaul opines that the Indian leaders and the people have not yet overcome the effect of their Ex-masters. Such neo-colonialism is being provided even more strength by imitation of their dress and working style. To provide an instance, Dr Ambedkar, the chairman of the draft committee of Indian Constitution wore a European style jacket and tie.

Naipaul puts the responsibility of division among Indians on political leadership. Division regarding region, religion, caste or language. National issues are neglected and local issues dominate the political scenario. There is loss of culture, tradition and religious identity. No attempt is made to preserve and culminate the Indian culture, language and religious faith. Naipaul is critical of the fact that all efforts are being made to westernise the Indian society by promoting the value system of colonisers.

As a concluding remark for the trilogy, we may infer that in "*An Area of Darkness*", "India" is represented as a metaphor related to Naipaul's own journey into his "self", and is

devoid of, as Edward Soja says, “the political concreteness of social spatiality”. But his first visit to his ancestral homeland also sparks in him a deep psychological issue of identity crisis, which gradually turns into a strong belief in the creative possibilities of having the subject-position of migrant liminality. In the coming years, Naipaul expresses his doubt of the ideological consequences of either metropolitan mimicry or cultural nationalism in the decolonized societies. This critical shift in his perceptions make him particularly aware of the futility of the sense of belongingness to the mythical India of his childhood imagination and to compensate, he enters a new phase of imagination in his next travel accounts about India.

In “*India: A Wounded Civilization*”, “India” now does not serve to be a mere background to the authorial self-dramatization, but invites the author’s active participation in visualization of the development of social agency on its way to “modernity”. Also, laying claim to a political autonomy of its own. With a further shift in his views, “*India: A Million Mutinies Now*”, provides a new sociological analysis on the issue of “chaos”. Throughout the narrative of “*India: A Million Mutinies Now*”, there is a hint of understanding the spatial politics of post-independent India in the view of a new “marginal” imaginative mode beyond the immediately visible historical reality of post-Gandhian political situation as well as that of the Orientalist-Nationalist myth of an “eternal India”. In his final travelogue on India, the binary contradiction between “Renaissance” and “Continuity” that obsessed Naipaul in “*India: A Wounded Civilization*”, astonishingly turns into the dream of a socially mobilized and intellectually enlightened mass-reality of the country. In the abode of Naipaul’s migrant imagination, the simultaneous discourses of tradition and modern progress flow together into the creation of a contrapuntal cultural geography of post-colonialism and “modernity” in contemporary India.

What one observes at the centre of Naipaul’s works is an over-mastering irony. It was Western colonialism that gave him his first experiences of indignity and exploitation, and injected in him a lifelong feeling of dislocation and an anger that continues to burn in his soul. Yet at the same time, he is able to recognize that in today’s world, most of the injustices are perpetrated by powers which are against the West. The West is now that part of the world in which human rights are most thoroughly protected, human talents are given recognition and human potential most fully realized. It is in the West, that men and women are most likely to enjoy their lives—and, in his case, the ability to write according to his wishes. Consequently, Naipaul praises Western civilization and refuses to condescend to Third World people by using terms such as “half-made” societies. He cares enough for them to admit that they deserve better—and what they deserve is Western civilization, which Naipaul, in one of his lectures identified as “the universal civilization.”

Over the last few years this sharp criticism on Naipaul regarding his view of third world countries, specifically post-independence India, has met with resistance from at least two mutually sympathetic groups of critics. The first one is that of the West Indian scholars like John Thieme, Stephano Harney and Gordon Rohlehr, whose views on Naipaul’s pessimism about the postcolonial nation-state is different, read as indictment of imperialism. “Imperialism and the wicked consequences of colonialism”, Harney writes, “are the central themes of Naipaul’s work. The dismissive comments on the Third World are made in this context- a Third World disfigured by the greed and violence of the colonial powers”. This understanding is strongly confirmed by a second group of metropolitan postcolonial critics, who include Sara Suleri, Michael Gorra and

Ian Baucom. Going against the rigid binary of empire and its colonial other, these scholars apply the strong cultural/political ambivalence produced by the colonial encounter, and embodied in diasporic writers like Naipaul. Naipaul's critique of England-as-empire, they suggest, is not explicit in his cantankerous account of colonial complicity.

Gorra interprets Naipaul's impatience with the colonised world, and with the neo-colonial nation-state, in a positive manner, as an appeal for ideological change. It is impatience, he says, which "allies Naipaul with Fanon... He has that kind of rage, the rage that in other men and women brought independence into being, that made the postcolonial world". According to Rob Nixon, Naipaul's writer intent is not on "ventriloquizing an English identity", his gaze upon Englishness is projected to show a greater self-reflexivity, and a complex web of his own implication in the workings of empire. Always writing himself into his critique of the postcolonial condition, his work yields to the existential cost of desiring the metropolitan "modern" England from the colonial marginal position. "The need for angry critiques of his work", then, as Suleri tells us, "is now obsolete, or such critiques must be prepared to admit what each successive text from *An Area of Darkness* to *The Enigma of Arrival* makes increasingly clear: Naipaul has already been there before them and has been exquisitely angry with himself"

At the end we are certainly left with two ways of criticisms here. First, the reportage is methodologically flawed. And one may infer that it is what it is. Naipaul is not projecting himself to be an ethnologist or a professional historian and writes as the attentive visitor, seeing for self, conversing with people, openly accepting the randomness of experiences, believing in own perceptions and hobbyist research, drawing own conclusions. This could be called an imperfect *modus operandi* but a transparent one. It is onto the reader how he/she decide for self what weight, if any, will be given to what he/she reads.

The other criticism is that his work manifests racist neo-colonialism. Naipaul certainly does not step back from accepting that the imperial project had some constructive consequences. Thus he credits the British with introducing to India, ideas of human association which in turn had the effect of disturbing India's ancient stagnant ways of seeing itself, thereby incurring the growth of a new national self-consciousness. Could this also be called neo-colonialism? Either way, Naipaul's mentioning of the horrors and failings of colonization are extensive, and it's hard to see how the criticism can be made to stick; at least, to the either/or fallacy once very powerful twenty years ago and before, when it was difficult to draw attention to the infirmities of post-colonial societies, or indeed of pre-colonial societies, without being categorized, by serious people, as an apologist for the imperial era.

"I travel to discover other states of mind," V. S. Naipaul writes in one of the essays in his collection, *"The Writer and the World."* "And if for this intellectual adventure I go to places where people live restricted lives, it is because my curiosity is still dictated in part by my colonial Trinidad background. I go to places which, however alien, connect in some way with what I already know."

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