

Chapter III

Naipaul: An Irritated Traveller in *An Area of Darkness*

III.1 Introduction

An Area of Darkness (1964), in his own words, is the product of Naipaul's first encounter with India or the East. Until then his understanding of India solely depended on books published by Gollanez and Messors Allen and Unwin. It is no wonder that his reading did not throw much light on this area of darkness, which aroused his curiosity because it was the native place of his grandfather and other relatives. This curiosity was further vetted by the Indian things the household possessed, "India lay around us in things, in a string bed....in plaited straw mats; in innumerable brass vessels;...in brightly colored pictures of deities on pink lotus or radiant against Himalayan snow; and in all the paraphernalia of a prayer room....the images, the smooth pebbles, the stick of sandalwood". (Naipaul, 1964, 23-24) There were also pictures of snow-covered Himalayas, and a number of assorted articles in 'Puja Room' with the images of God.

Naipaul, as a child, though brought up in a high caste Hindu family that still performed Hindu religious rituals, himself remained skeptical and an unbeliever, because he could not take pleasure in the religious ceremonies, prayers (in Sanskrit) and the significance of the images in the Puja Room, which did not interest him. Naipaul's family must have been Brahmins originally from Uttar Pradesh, but he refused to go through the thread-ceremony, a must for a Brahmin boy. The ritual appeared ridiculous to him.

Thus, Naipaul who visits India is not like his grandfather, who had religious and cultural moorings in Indian Hindu society. However, his curiosity about India was aroused by the snow-clad mountain ranges of the Himalaya, the images of Gods and Goddesses in the Puja room.

One can see that Naipaul's family background hardly helped him to understand India or what being a Hindu really meant. He disliked the Bollywood movies. He disliked the way Indians appeared to celebrate their Diwali festival, burning electric lamps rather than the traditional earthen ones. The only Indians he came across in Trinidad or later in England, were the Sindhi and Gujrati Baniyas, who lived enclosed lives and contributed little to the society.

The experience based on his first visit to India shocked Naipaul because, it seems, it challenged his idea of himself. The difference between the imagined India in Trinidad during childhood and the first hand experience of the country was too overwhelming to be confronted. The only immediate solution available was that of escape. That is why *An Area of Darkness* begins with 'A Resting Place for Imagination' and ends in a 'Flight'- a metaphoric fleeing away from reality. However, the experience of India does not end with the crossing over of national boundary. In far-off Madrid when India was twenty-four hours behind him, Naipaul reflects:

I was a tourist, free, with money. But a whole experience had just occurred; India had ended only twenty-four hours before. It was a journey that ought not to have been made; it had broken my life in two. (Naipaul, 1964, 289)

These words appear in the final chapter of *An Area of Darkness*, the most lyrical, sad and melancholic book of the Indian trilogy. It was the first time that Naipaul had a chance to see the country his grandfather left at the end of the eighteenth century. From the very beginning of the book, it seems that Naipaul is disenchanted with the reality that he has to face during his first sojourn in the country of his ancestors. It appears to be powerful emotional experience for him, which strongly influenced his further writing.

An Area of Darkness is a reflective and semi-autobiographical account of a year spent by V. S. Naipaul in India. By many critics it has been considered as the most compelling and vivid book on India to appear for a long time. The book was met with mixed reception. The book was condemned and rejected and has also been appreciated

wholeheartedly. The present chapter describes Naipaul's first visit to India in 1962, capturing rather frustrating experience of Naipaul in India which is depicted by him in *An Area of Darkness*.

The present chapter simultaneously focuses on Naipaul's frustration throughout the journey resulting from preconceived idea of India. If someone forms an imaginary picture of any place and after visiting the place, when one notices that imagination and reality are totally different, one is likely to end up with harsh criticism. It seems that Naipaul went through the same experience and the result is severe criticism on socio-political life of India. Irrespective of the background of this criticism, one should not neglect this harsh commentary on social-political life of India because it makes us look at ourselves as the 'other'; so this chapter will also try to evaluate it critically. The present chapter, therefore, undertakes the evaluation of Naipaul's criticism in the light of what he saw and experienced here.

III.2 Romantic Preconception of India

It seems that Naipaul's idea of India found its way to him through the very fact of his birth in a Hindu family in Trinidad. India lay around him 'in people' and 'in things' ever since he gained consciousness. The locality in which he spent his childhood consisted of immigrant Indians, especially from north India. India also existed around Naipaul in various domestic articles that his grandfather had brought from India; however India still remained featureless for him. His grandfather built a house in Trinidad with a flat-roof, which was odd among the houses built in the colonial style around it.

Although Naipaul lived in the India of his grandfather, it seems that he could not inherit the spirit and unity of his grandfather's world. His grandfather lived in Trinidad in typical Indian way of life. It became possible for him as "he carried his village with him" (Naipaul, 1964, 25). However, it appears that Naipaul's generation could not replicate this sense of complete self-sufficiency; it could not for a moment forget being Trinidadian. From Naipaul's narration one observes that as he grew up in this new culture, India slipped further away and belonged merely to his grandfather's world. He

says, "The rituals and ceremonies of their private world survived but the corresponding knowledge was lost: our elders expected that our understanding would be instinctive and no one explained the prayer or the ritual". (Naipaul, 1964, 32)

Apart from the domestic Indian articles in the house, another introduction to the Indian way of life was through the stories that his father wrote:

These stories celebrated Indian village life, and the Hindu rituals that gave grace and completeness to that life.....to me they gave a beauty...to the Indian village life I had never known. And when we went to the country to visit my father's own relations...it was like fairytale come to life. (Naipaul, 1985, 36)

In this way, it seems that he had already formulated a picture of Indian socio-political life and traditional and conventional aspects of India in his imagination before he visited India. As a result of it, during his journey through various places in India, he tried to find out this imaginary picture. In this respect, an eminent critic on Naipaul, Suvir Kaul opines in *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*:

There 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 ordinary plenitude, in the land of his maternal grandfather. (Mehrotra, 2003, 235)

It is also essential here to note that Naipaul had grown skeptical of Hindu religious rituals that his family practiced. It appeared ridiculous to him. He refused to go through the thread ceremony (typically meant for the Brahmin boy), though later he came to appreciate the touching drama enacted in the ceremony, of a boy insisting on going away to Banaras for study, and the mother weeping and begging him to stay, a pleasing piece of theatre, Naipaul comments. But he also notes how incongruous the ceremony appeared in Trinidad yard. He was, however, made conscious of his being a

Brahmin boy, in the science laboratory, when he refused to sip the siphon tube being already sucked by the other boys, and one boy whispered 'Real Brahmin'. These little episodes in Naipaul's early life show how he was growing more and more un-Indian; estranging himself from what was Indian in himself and his family. Because of this preconceived notion of India, throughout his journey; he tried to find out what he already knew about India. The first chapter of *An Area of Darkness* 'A Resting Place for the Imagination' throws light on the mind set of Naipaul at the beginning of this journey.

III.2.1 Indian Perspective in *An Area of Darkness*

In spite of this background one should not neglect his observations of India because these observations are of an 'insider' as well as of an 'outsider'. As an eminent critic Suman Gupta says,

In *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul is concerned primarily with describing the nuances of the unique kind of colonial mimicry he found in India, and with charting its (largely adverse) effects. That is the importance of this book: in his first encounter with India Naipaul doesn't try to delve into its essentially Indian depths, he is content to examine its peculiar old world variety of colonial mimicry and to observe the effects. (Gupta, 2010, 80)

The above comment suggests that the book is filled with harsh commentary on India. On arriving in India, finding himself in the crowds at the Churchgate station, Naipaul for the first time lost his distinction and found himself as indistinctive as any Indian in the crowd. The experiences of Naipaul with various offices and people in India, present the picture of India he saw through his western educated and skeptical point of view. Because of this negative presentation of India, the book received scathing criticism by many Indians; it describes Indian socio-political life closely. This presentation of India by this writer brings forth Indian perspective. The later part of this chapter is an attempt to highlight this Indian perspective critically.

III.2.2 Encounter with the Indian Bureaucracy

In the first chapter, 'Degree', one can find a glimpse of the working of the Indian government offices. Naipaul harshly criticizes the attitude of the government employees as they do not work with devotion. Ramnath, the steno, refuses to type a letter because that is not his job. His boss, Mr. Malhotra with an English university education does not recognize this job division. The argument gets worse when Ramnath declines not to help his boss. Finally, when Mr. Malhotra takes the matter to higher authorities, his boss tells him to neglect the matter and get it done from somebody else. Hence the officer like Mr. Malhotra finds it very difficult to work in such environment.

Naipaul, in his 'Traveller's Prelude', tells that how the East was revealed to him bit by bit from his sojourn in Cairo onwards. His sojourn at Cairo was the beginning of his encounter with the East in general and India in particular. He has his first encounter with Indian bureaucracy when he tries to collect his wine bottles from the customs, as he is shunted from one table to another and one branch of office to other. He graphically describes indifference of the office employees when his lady companion fainted and he needed water for her. Naipaul tries to give his impressions of the Indian bureaucracy, their sluggishness and indifference. It took him hours and involved going from one building to other, from one table to other before he could get his bottles of liquor. He gives his experiences of Indian bureaucracy without making any observations. Perhaps this frustrating experience in the initial part of his journey sets the tone of the rest of the travelogue. In this regard, Suvir Kaul states:

The opening sections of *An Area of Darkness* are thus often about the loss of voice and self-possession (including his now famous description of his attempts to rescue two bottles of liquor from the clutches of customs bureaucracy that then administered liquor licenses in a Bombay under prohibition). What follows in the travelogue can be understood, in all its richness of reportage and observation and its failure of spirit

and empathy, as Naipaul's attempts to recover his bearings, to 'impose' himself in his surroundings. (Mehrotra, 2003, 236)

Hence, the way he describes his experiences is quite revealing how the Indian bureaucracy appeared indifferent to the traveller's predicament. There was absence of clear instructions. The clerks were mostly closed lips and did not volunteer any information about the procedure to follow. There was even lack of understanding between one table or branch and other.

In the same vein he records an interesting episode highlighting the tragic situation of the officers like Malhotra and Malik. They are in a financial class that puts them below the aristocracy and above the middle-class. They are rejected as possible bridegrooms by the aristocratic families, and they cannot go down to the middle class for seeking a bride. The India bureaucracy is thus class-ridden and harbours pretensions making life miserable for them. The Anglo-Indians like Bunty do not mentally belong to the Indian community. The higher-ups in bureaucracy, especially the military officers keep pretensions of the British manners making frequent use of expressions like 'By Jove'. Naipaul, thus, notes how Indian society in general, and the bureaucracy in particular, is class-ridden and having false notions about themselves, mimicking the foreigners that once ruled them.

What Naipaul critically notes in India is the 'degree of degradation', the way the Indian community is divided into castes and the class, and the way the Indians try to stick to these distinctions at the cost of the work not done. For example, a clerk will not bring you a glass of water because it is not his duty. The architect would not make drawings because it is the job of a draughtsman. The land is divided into tiny pieces, and record of it carefully stashed in red or yellow files, because, Naipaul comments, 'definition and distinction' appear to be the need of the Indians, and the British answered it. He notes how the Indians maintained their distinction from one another, in their dress, the way they maintained their beard or cropped their hair, and so on. He quotes the advice from Bhagwad Geeta, in which, the Indians (Hindus) are exhorted to do their duty. He says:

Even if it be humble, rather than another's even it be great. To die in one's duty is life: to live in another's is death (Naipaul, 1964, 45)

But, Naipaul is here distorting with what *The Geeta* says. The way the clerks behave in the Indian offices, has nothing to do with the advice in *The Geeta*. It is the practice imposed on them by the British or it is the universal human nature to stick to one's own field of activity. Naipaul loves to generalize from his singular personal experiences and tries to relate simple human tendencies to religion or scriptures.

However, later in this chapter, Naipaul notes some positive changes taking place in the society. On the one hand Naipaul comes across frustrating experience of government employees and on the other hand we find Naipaul appreciating Indians for breaking their 'caste-skills', and trying their hands on other traditional businesses never practiced by their ancestors. He gives examples of some successful people from different sections of the society, who broke the barriers of traditional work and stepped into other businesses making money. For Naipaul, this is a new trend emerging in India. He cites the example of Jivan, who begins a side business and earns as much as Mr. Malhotra does. The two Brahmin brothers in the South venture into leather business and get huge profit. Hence 'Degree' for Naipaul stands as an understanding of an Indian of himself. In this chapter Naipaul positively speaks about the break-up of 'caste-skill'. This chapter gives mixed opinion of Naipaul as he criticizes Indian government employees on the one hand and on the other he appreciates that people are trying to break the societal norms and accepting the work outside their 'caste-skill'. He rightly comments that this is the initial stage of development.

III.2.3 The Function of Beggars

Beggars in India, thronging at the gates of the temples, moving in the trains from one compartment to the other, crowding public places etc. are a matter of comment of all foreigners. Naipaul is not an exception. He states that "a foreigner cannot understand the function of a beggar in India", which he himself answers by

saying, it makes the act of charity “automatic reverence to God, like the offering of a prayer or a spin of prayer-wheel”. (Naipaul, 1964, 68-69)

This is not just an Indian phenomenon. It pervades in quite a few Eastern countries. And it has its origin in the deeply rooted religious sentiment that is enclosed in the saying, *Atithi Devo Bhava* in Sanskrit, which means, a guest is a God and ought to be offered something. Now, it is true that the lawless individuals have been taking advantage of this religious sentiment by raising hordes of beggars, making it their thriving business. The social workers in India itself have been active against their unlawful activity. It is true that the efforts of these people and of the government fall too short of fighting this ill in the society. Naipaul notes the crippled beggars, mostly children, who must have been forcibly crippled for begging purposes to arouse pity in the minds of the people. Naipaul comments that beggary has its special function in India, and cannot be judged from the European perspective, that beggars have a secure position within the society. It is an inseparable element of India.

Naipaul does not go deep into the investigation of the existence of beggars. It has been the result of the foreign rule over India and its unfair policies. But Naipaul, the short-time visitor does not have time to go to the root of the problem. He quotes, “a foreigner who dissents against the so-called belief of the Indians that giving to a beggar is an automatic act of charity which is an automatic reverence to God” (Naipaul, 1964, 69). This is gross generalization. Many people give a small coin to a crippled beggar out of sympathy, and not with any religious sentiment in mind. There are beggars sitting in a line and they are offered food brought for this purpose. Naipaul, perhaps conveniently forgets that even in the western countries giving ‘alms’ to the beggars or mendicants is and was a matter of religious sentiment of charity. ‘The foreigner’, Naipaul’s quotes cannot really be a foreigner, because he refers to himself as ‘we’, clubbing him with the Indians.

In the same chapter, Naipaul himself says that poverty in India is obvious and you have to ignore the obvious to find something else. But it seems that he makes no effort to ignore the obvious. There is an unmistakable contempt for poverty that is spoken through his sentences. While he blames India for making no efforts to alleviate

it, he makes no effort even to understand it. It is likely that he is in a hurry to fill the pages.

III.2.4 Collective Blindness

After presenting his views on beggars, Naipaul turns his attention to the act of 'defecation'. He says that defecating belongs to India in the same way as beggary. It has become almost a ritual. People walk in the streets full of excrements they do not notice, or even see. Although latrines and toilets are still not commonplace in India, the only reason for this situation is that Indians prefer defecating in an open air. It has become their daily routine and habit. For the westerner it is altogether incomprehensible as Naipaul asserts:

Indians defecate everywhere. They defecate, mostly, beside the railway tracks. But they also defecate on the beaches; they defecate on the hills; they defecate on the river banks; they defecate on the streets; they never look for cover. These squatting figures are never spoken of; they are never written about; they are not mentioned in novels or stories; they do not appear in feature films or documentaries. The truth is that Indians do not see these squatters and might even, with complete sincerity, deny that they exist. (Naipaul, 1964, 70-71)

It seems that Naipaul's western self does not allow him to remain blind to the obvious fact and he becomes extremely disgusted by the visual aspect of India. His severe indictments and accusations of Indian people, being blind to, what for the western people is striking to the eye, are full of his own despair. He calls it collective blindness of the Indians. However, the critic like Fukrul Islam feels that it is only to shock the readers that he writes in this way. He says:

Surely, there is an attempt to shock here, and to pass off a partial truth (yes, some Indians do tend to defecate publicly) into the whole truth. But the religious explanation seems to be completely bogus, and the great powers of observation and the

careful structuring of the sentences are wasted because of the generalizations that they lead to. After all, there is much more involved here than claustrophobia; the conclusion arrived at is facile and hardly worthy of the mind that has produced such effective descriptions of many aspects of Indian life! (Panwar, 2007, 191)

No wonder, accusations made by Naipaul sound like ultimate irreverence to those who take themselves to be custodians of Indian culture. No Indian can be proud of this dirt and defecation: and it is very revealing that no Indian except Mahatma Gandhi has described this defecation. Having lived outside India for long, he notices this Indian social ill and reacts against it. He consciously highlights this dirt and defecation as if it is to him a kind of sudden realization, which is actually not. It is only an inherent evil of Indian society. Everybody is aware of it but has no substantial remedy. C. D. Narsimhaiah rightly puts it:

India is a relic of a predominantly agriculture society in the process of transforming itself into the urban, but not having resources enough to the ever increasing emigration of landless laborers. They are literally flooding the city. Besides there are city sights which are aesthetically far more revolting than defecation. (Narsimhaiah, 1965, 88)

This is how it happened in the newly industrialized cities like London, where slums grew fast without any sanitary establishments available to the peasants thronging into the cities. In spite of these arguments one should not neglect the failure of all of us, including the government, not to build and maintain enough lavatories and latrines everywhere. Hence this chapter brings forth some important issues of life of the Indians. Though he is very critical in his remarks, he was making sense while talking about defecating openly. It may be a common practice in India, but for a foreigner, it certainly is a strange experience.

III.2.5 Place of Mahatma Gandhi

Naipaul's much-disputed analysis of Mahatma Gandhi covers the second half of this chapter. He says that "India undid him. He became a Mahatma" (Naipaul, 1964, 74) Naipaul has praised Mahatma Gandhi for noticing the other side of this country as no other Indian could see, and speaks freely. He says:

He looked at India as no Indian was able to; his vision was direct, and this directness was, and is, revolutionary. He sees exactly what the visitor sees; he does not ignore the obvious. He sees the beggars and the shameless pundits and the filth of Banaras; he sees the atrocious sanitary habits of doctors, lawyers and journalists. He sees the Indian callousness, the Indian refusal to see. No Indian attitude escapes him, no Indian problem; he looks down to the roots of the static society. (Naipaul, 1964, 74)

According to Dr. Vasant Patel, Naipaul appreciates Mahatma Gandhi wherever he finds him neutrally criticizing Indian way of life and condemns him where his approach is to favour Indian attitude. Naipaul supports Mahatma Gandhi's opinion that sanitation in India is linked to caste-designated roles and a break-up of the caste system has filled the country with filth. Mahatma Gandhi saw the maladies of India and tried to dignify labour. He united the whole nation as no one else could have done. But in the end, he himself was absorbed into great Indian symbolism. The nation he tried to change placed him on a pedestal and continued on its way. This observation about Gandhi appears to be correct because he says that:

It is so with Indians and Gandhi. He is the latest proof of their spirituality; he strengthens the private contrast with God of all who revere him. Nothing remains of Gandhi in India but this; his name and the worship of his image, the seminars about non-violence, as though this was all he taught; prohibition, rich in symbolism and righteousness, proclaimed as a worthy goal

even at the height of the China crisis; and the politician's garb.
(Naipaul, 1964, 83)

One notices significant difference in the approach of both Naipaul and Gandhi. According to Suvir Kaul, "The difference is simply that Gandhi saw the production and removal of shit as a social problem and addressed it accordingly; Naipaul did not see fit to fashion from it a final comment on 'Indianness'". (Mehrotra, 2003, 237) There is no doubt that Mahatma Gandhi saw the poverty and defecation, detested them and wrote about them. But his writings do not show contempt for the people; he hates only those acts. He doesn't stop with ridiculing those activities; he tries to understand the reasons by being one of the people; he tries to rectify them; he picks up the broom and a mop and cleans the defecation. On the other hand, Naipaul is only exasperated with what he sees and sees nothing beyond.

III.2.6 Craze for Foreign Things

The last chapter of the first section 'Romancers', depicts Naipaul's experience as a paying guest in Delhi. With the help of Mrs. Mahindra, the owner of the house, he observes that new society is emerging in India. There is newly found prosperity and the freedom that it brings. The women of this new society are now obsessed with the foreign things. He, for example, describes the secretary of Women's League, Mrs. M. Mehta, who is almost crazy about foreign things. Naipaul comments on the house of Mrs. M Mehta thus:

The house was new and on this ground floor smelled of concrete and paints. The rooms were not yet fully decorated, the furnishing were sparse. But there were fans everywhere; and the bathroom fittings from Germany, were rare and expensive. 'I am craze for foreign, just craze for foreign', Mrs. Mahindra said. (Naipaul, 1964, 87)

Naipaul feels that these women represent emerging feminism in the society, who want to throw away the shackles of the tradition. They do not like anything that is made in this country. So Mrs. Mahindra observes even the suitcase of Naipaul with

curiosity. Rather than critically portraying the newly rich Indians, Naipaul mimics these characters as these women are trying to escape their traditional roles. Thus in this mimicry of these women enjoying their newly won freedom, one understands newly emerging class of women who consider themselves different from other women in the society. He comments that these women are really confused about their exact role in the society. One also notices that these men and women in this neuro-rich Indian society hardly have any social awareness. Even now they do not go to vote in the general elections of India. I think the characters like Mrs. Mahindra represent the new class of Indian women who consider themselves the torchbearers of feminism. These women with their ultra-modern thinking are self-centered and contribute very little or sometimes nothing at all.

III.2.7 Peaceful Kashmir

After rather frustrating experience so far, the only place of comfort for Naipaul is Kashmir. It has a soothing effect on the irritated author. After the disillusionment and frustration that Naipaul suffers when he comes to India, Kashmir serves as a place of rest and peace for him. He says:

Kashmir was coolness and colour: the yellow mustard fields, the mountains, snowcapped, the milky blue sky in which we rediscovered the drama of clouds. It was men wrapped in brown blankets against the morning mist, and barefooted shepherd boys with caps and covered ears on steep wet rocky slopes. (Naipaul, 1964, 99)

He remembers the pictures of the Himalayas that he saw in his grandmother's house in Trinidad. The Himalayas belong to the India of his "fantasy" world. It serves as his jumping-off point in the world of chaos and twists. It is something static and peaceful; his only childhood vision that has been fulfilled. So Sudha Rai says, "It is also the place where he recaptures the idyllic world of his childhood" (Rai, 1982, 20).

III.2.8 Problems of Kashmir Valley

The second part of the travelogue consists of three chapters and it offers critical exploration of India. This part is filled with Naipaul's conversations with various people in the society. Through these conversations, it appears that Naipaul attempts to understand the after effects of colonial rule in India. The first chapter 'A Doll's House on Dal Lake' describes his stay in Hotel Liward in Srinagar. It seems to be the make-believe world of Mr. Butt, Aziz and the *Khansamah*. These men have no idea of themselves and they continually seek commercial benefits. Naipaul sarcastically remarks, "Snow White's own men" are trying to survive long after 'Snow White' had left. (Naipaul, 1964, 108)

Naipaul observes that with the going of imperial rule, "one type of glory had gone" and "the other type hadn't set in". He says, 'English taste' was flaunted as "superior" and "Indian taste" was considered inferior. (Naipaul, 1964, 119) It was the period of blankness rooted in the past. So they all want type written certificates from Naipaul because they think that these would add to their credibility. With the help of this certificate they can obtain permit from the 'Tourism Department'.

After describing the life of these people, Naipaul feels that this place is extremely beautiful, but it is the inability of the government not to promote this place as a 'Tourist place'. This observation of Naipaul relates to the Kashmir of 1960s, when there was political instability in Kashmir, and the Govt. of India as well as the Govt. of Kashmir were still trying hard to develop the economy of the valley despite the unrest created by the terrorists. The situation still persists to some extent; however the terrorists have realized they cannot displease the Kashmiri people by harming the tourist trade.

The next chapter 'Medieval City' continues to explore various problems of the valley of Kashmir. Naipaul observes that Kashmiris have forgotten their history and now survive on legends. He cites the example of a young man who thinks that Akbar's "late sixteenth century fort in the "Dal Lake" as five thousand years old. (Naipaul, 1964, 129) Naipaul interacts with many people and notices that "Religion.....was life and law

for them" (Naipaul, 1964, 129) The Muslim medical student did not believe that the world was made in six days, but "was more of a religious fanatic than Aziz who, secure in his system, inspected other systems with tolerant interests" (Naipaul, 1964, 129).

Hence, it seems that Naipaul finds the Valley suffering from selective amnesia. The engineer, who is showing the valley to Naipaul, drives past the eighth century "Awantipur" ruins and shows no interest in them. He observes that the history of the people in the valley has begun with the history of the conquerors but the most recent history of Sheikh Abdullah has already been forgotten by the educated youngsters like his engineer guide.

In the entire chapter Naipaul tries to catch the ethos of Kashmiri youths, struggling to find permanent source of income. Even the government does not have any agenda to channelize this force of youngsters.

III.2.9 Pilgrimage

The third chapter of the second part describes Naipaul's pilgrimage to the cave of "Amarnath". It begins with a description of the five-foot ice *lingham* of "Amarnath":

It was a mystery, like Delphi, of the older world. It had survived because it was of India and Hinduism which, without beginning, without end, scarcely a religion, continued as a repository and living record of man's religious consciousness. (Naipaul, 1964, 164)

The chapter is more about Naipaul's encounter with the 'Himalayas' of his Trinidadian childhood and less about his experience of the journey. He rides a pony and reaches thirteen thousand feet high cave of "Amarnath" and tries to recapitulate the childhood memory of the Himalaya.

I felt linked to them...India, the Himalayas: they went together. In so many of the brightly coloured religious pictures in my grandmother's house I had seen these mountains, cones of white against simple, cold blue. They had become a part of India of my fantasy. (Naipaul, 1964, 177)

However, when he encountered the actual Himalayas, it seemed to him as the Indian symbol of loss so he says, "they were at once near and far: near in the imagination but almost inaccessible to the vast populace which could seek them only in pilgrimages, legends and pictures" (Naipaul, 1964, 177-178)

It appears that Naipaul is somewhat disillusioned with this romantic notion of the Himalayas he had nursed during his childhood. But in spite of this knowledge, a part of his mind continues to believe in the possibility of the truthfulness of these pictures. Hence the chapter establishes that India for Naipaul is something which cannot be claimed. What he says of the Himalayas is also true of his own experience, He can only look back at India 'with yearning', he can return to it only in 'pilgrimages, legends and pictures'. In spite of his recapitulative mood in this journey, he cannot turn a blind eye to poor sanitation for the pilgrims throughout the journey. He highlights it specifically and when they reach the cave, he says that it becomes fish market as these *yatris* become undisciplined.

Naipaul gives us succinct picture of the life of the common people like Bashir, the educated one and Aziz, the unlettered hotel employee, who were oblivious of the Kashmir problems that were propagated in the newspaper and on the radio. There were imaginary stories being circulated among the unlettered and half-educated Kashmiris about Shaikh Abdullah and the falsehood propagated by Pakistani press and radio about happenings in Kashmir.

Naipaul dispassionately notes down the contemporary scene of socio-political situation in Kashmir. He observes that the anti-Indian feeling is spread most in the Punjabi Muslims in Kashmir rather than by the native Kashmiri themselves. Even educated Kashmiris like Bashir, he notes, were ignorant of the recent history and situation of Kashmir, which is shocking to Naipaul. Naipaul here is objectively noting his observations gathered from his encounter with only a few individuals he comes across in his Kashmir stay.

III.2.10 The colonial Past

After his comments on poverty and beggary, his views on the post-independent India brought him more criticism. He tries to find out some basic reasons of many invasions in India. First he begins with the latest foreign rule of England in the country. Naipaul tries to compare and contrast the British empires in the West Indies and in India in the first chapter of the third section called 'Fantasy and Ruins. He says:

The British had possessed the country so completely. Their withdrawal was irrevocable. And to me even after many months something of fantasy remained attached to all the reminders of their presence. England was at least as many-faceted as India. (Naipaul, 1964, 199)

He says that England as he experienced in Trinidad, was not the England he lived in and neither of these countries could be related to England that was the source of so much that he now saw about himself in India. After giving such a personal touch to his visit, he goes on exploring various reasons for long British dominance in India.

According to Naipaul, Indo-British encounter was not successful; it ended in a double fantasy. Their new self awareness makes it impossible for Indians to go back; their cherishing of Indianness makes it difficult for them to go ahead. In the concept of Indianness, the sense of continuity was bound to be lost. The creative urge failed. Instead of continuity we have the static. "Shiva has ceased to dance". (Naipaul, 1964, 216-217)

He sees Indians living with the Raj that was long dead. India, for Naipaul, in this way, becomes a country that lived almost incongruous because "everything is inherited, nothing is abolished" (Naipaul, 1964, 202). Then he moves on to a detailed analysis of literature and the contemporary society of its times. He cites the example of R. K. Narayan and says that Post-independent India is successfully captured in his works. He thinks that the glimpses of 'Raj' are still present everywhere in India as if unending mimicry of the Raj. The Raj itself being the classical case of imitation of all

that was thought to be 'English', the inheritors of the 'Raj' followed the same pattern. India goes on living on the ruins of the Empire. He says:

Distinct from this was the England of the Raj. This still lived. It lived in the division of the country towns into 'cantonment', civil lines and bazaars. It lived in army officer's messes. It lived in uniforms, moustaches and swagger sticks and mannerisms and jargons. It lived in the collectorates and so on.....(Naipaul, 1964, 202)

Apart from societal ruins, he thinks that there are other kinds of ruins that lie across the length and the breadth of the country: the ruins of Vijaynagar, the ravages of Muslim rule in the north, and the disjointed idea of history in the minds of the people. The creation of India was built on destruction. There is no continuity and this discontinuity became more prominent with the coming of the British. The Raj sought to express 'an idea of itself as English'. Nationalist India accepted this as an accepted pattern; hence it tries "to express an idea of itself."(Naipaul, 1964, 207) In the whole process art was lost. Naipaul gives the example of the Indian Memorial of the Mutiny at Lucknow and of the new temple at Kurukshetra. The beauty and originality of art was lost. "Somewhere something has snapped", says Naipaul. (Naipaul, 1964, 207) The British were responsible for the death of Indian art, for the break up in continuity.

Later on Naipaul analyzes the chaos caused by the British to Hindu India. He opines that though Hindu India faced many invasions and conquerors in the past, they had been absorbed into the main stream. "Hindu India met conquerors half-way and had always been able to absorb them". (Naipaul, 1964, 209) This continuity was broken by the coming of the British:

The British refused to be absorbed into India; they did not proclaim, like the Mogul, that if there was a paradise on earth, it was this, and it was this, and it was this. While dominating India they expressed their contempt for it, and projected England; and Indians were forced into nationalism....It was an

immense self-violation.....a flattering self-assessment could only be achieved with the help of Europeans like Max Muller...(Naipaul, 1964, 211)

Hence the rejection of India and projection of England created a chaos. Indians found themselves "in a new world whose forms they could see but whose spirit eluded them. In the acquiring of an identity in their own land they become displaced". (Naipaul, 1964, 212) He says, "The incongruity was everywhere, it was routinely carried out in courts whose proceedings and language were foreign to the people involved." (Naipaul, 1964, 212) Then he goes on talking about English language and comments, "Language is like a sense", and in this respect, "the psychological damage caused by the continued official use of English...is immense". (Naipaul, 1964, 213) According to him English could never be the medium of expression of Indian sentiments. It took away the proximity of emotions that the process of reading generates and presented a superficial tabulation of Indian sentimentality. The entire chapter throws light on the ultimate damage caused on the Indian psyche during the colonial rule.

Remaining three chapters of this section record Naipaul's meeting with the cross-section of the society. Through these meetings, it seems that Naipaul tries to present the picture of India in conflict. According to him, it is a conflict arising out of ignorance. He gives the examples of an inspector of Forms and Stationary in the Northern Railway who remains non-existent for a Railway officer. Later he talks about the cigarette smoking Sikh showing violent hatred for Dravidians and is proud of his lineage and regards non-Aryans with contempt. Finally when he returns to his hotel room, he recapitulates these experiences and thinks that these people do not have any logical argument for their opinions.

III.2.11 Emergency

The next chapter 'Emergency' presents India's response to the Chinese attack on India. Naipaul observes that this attack caught Indians completely unawares and the Emergency only meant more speeches, more statutes of law. The politicians and the

common men were feeding merely on words. Later, the elites casually discussed the war as if it were something remote for them. Their usual life remained undisturbed by it. He thinks that the lectures at the Theosophical society were monotonous and irrelevant to the situation at hand. According to him Nehru's speeches were already beginning to sound like "helpless condolence". (Naipaul, 1964, 245) He goes on to say that general public of India remained away from it.

Naipaul sarcastically describes the reaction of the common Indians to the news of Chinese aggression. He was in Madras then, and noticed, with obvious sarcasm, how common Indians talked about the Chinese attack in a dispassionate manner. They went about their routine work, casually gathering at the corner and discussing the news as if it happened with some other country. He sarcastically observes that India "continued to produce mainly politicians and speeches". (Naipaul, 1964, 253)

India is a sprawling country and common people in India, hardly get involved in things that happen at far off places. Chinese invasion was totally unexpected and even the central government was neither aware of it nor prepared for any such eventuality. Naipaul puts his finger on the apathy of the common Indian, and on the garrulous politicians, who knew nothing better. His remark that India did not qualify for modern warfare was true then. Chinese invasion was an eye-opener to the Indian Government that so far indulged in peace politics, without realizing that it must be backed by army. Naipaul, in his objective narration, indulges in veiled criticism of Indian politics and politicians; and the inane talk of the political works in far off places like Madras. Naipaul does not realize that India, right from the ancient times, was not a war-mongering country. She had to learn a lesson, and she did in a hard way. But a foreigner like Naipaul cannot understand this.

III.3 Flight

The last chapter in the book is 'Village of the Dubes'. It records Naipaul's visit to the ancestral village of his maternal grandfather. He was afraid of what he might find; he was afraid that the final unity of his world in his grandmother's house might be shattered. In the beginning he was reassured seeing the mango groves that surrounded

the village giving it a pastoral look and at the same time differentiating it from the dust engulfed villages that he had seen on route.

Naipaul expresses happiness to see the spires of the shrines that his grandfather had built. He notices that women are unveiled. The IAS man accompanying him whispered, "Brahmin women, very fearless". (Naipaul, 1964, 254) He meets Jussodra, the old woman who had come with his grandfather from Trinidad. From her, he hears the story of his grandfather's success in Trinidad. He sees the photographs.

It seems very painful homecoming for Naipaul as he says, "In a year I had not learned acceptance, I had learned my separateness from India, and was content to be colonial, without a past, without ancestors". (Naipaul, 1964, 255). In an attempt to escape the pain of his situation; fearing the loss of unity of his world, Naipaul is ready to flee. He is ready to reject his roots. This is how his visit to his village ends. Finally he leaves the village, even discouraging the boy who wants to take on a lift. It appears to be final attempt at complete retreat. He says,

So it ended, in futility and impatience, a gratuitous act of cruelty, self-reproach and flight. (Naipaul, 1964, 263)

Naipaul came to India nursing grandiose ideas of India, his ancestral land, which he had imagined looking at the pictures of the snow-clad Himalayas, and assorted writings on India. But, on his actual encounter with India and the Indians, he is disappointed. His visit to his ancestral place fails to excite him; he does feel like connecting with the remnants of his relations now living in the village of the Dubeys. He had romantic ideas in his mind about India, Indians and the native place of his forefathers. At the contact of reality, these ideas solely disappointed him.

But one wonders, how, as a writer Naipaul had not developed sensibility to understand and cope with the reality. The epilogue 'Flight' explains it more fully. From this narration we notice that his distance from India is too great to be bridged. So this flight is metaphoric flight from his reality of himself and signifies physical and mental distancing of Naipaul from India.

III.4 Naipaul's Expatriate Sensibility: Triple Identity

V. S. Naipaul seems to have been a complex personality. He is an Indian Brahmin uprooted from the land of his ancestors. It is a known fact that his grandfather migrated to Trinidad as an indentured labourer. Secondly, he is a West Indian by his birth and growth. Thirdly, he is an expatriate in London because of his self-made exile. Obviously these three factors are largely responsible for the shaping of his personality. They are important in the making up of his personality and mental attitude. It appears that he is obsessed with India, but his way of thinking is British, though he is West Indian by birth and growth. This 'expatriate sensibility' appears to have affected Naipaul's disappointing encounter with India, the land of his ancestors.

Keeping in mind this 'expatriate sensibility', Naipaul's books on India brings forward several other points at the outset. Certainly it is the sensibility of the person which affects his judgments and viewpoints. To make an authentic and objective assessment, two points have to be kept in mind, 'who' judges and 'who' or 'what is judged'. The judgment may not always be free from limitations. Here, the question of sensibility is involved; hence the classification of Naipaul's sensibility is important.

Naipaul assesses Indian life and culture, which is deeply influenced by Hindu norms of 'karma'. 'dharma' and 'moksha' against the background of western norms of individuality and freedom. As we know the Indian self and Western self are largely different. The Indian self has faith and accepts the things as they are, whereas the Western self challenges and checks the things from individual point of view. So, it is likely that Naipaul's feeling of India is not contempt but pain at the sorry condition of India. Considering this fact, let us take the statement, which gives the signs of Naipaul's conscious probing into Brahmanism and deep rooted Brahmin upbringing. He says:

I came from a family that abounded with Pundits. But I had been born as an unbeliever. I took no pleasure in religious ceremonies. They were too long and the food came only at the end. I did not understand the language, it was as if our elders expected that our understanding would be instinctive and no

one explained the prayers or the rituals, one ceremony was like another. The images did not interest me. I never sought to learn their significance....so it happened that though growing up in an orthodox family, I remained totally ignorant of Hinduism. What then survived of Hinduism in me? Perhaps I had received a certain supporting philosophy. I cannot say my uncle often put it to me that my denial was an admissible type of Hinduism. Examining myself, I found only that sense of the difference of people which I have tried to explain, a vague sense of caste and the horror of the unclean. (Naipaul, 1964, 32-33)

Thus Naipaul himself feels that his Hindu upbringing has left in him 'a vague sense of caste and the horror of the unclean'. The theories of 'karma', 'dharma' and 'moksha' advocates faith which is accepted without any doubt or question. There is no place for doubt. There is no question of logic or no question why, but the faith requires blind belief though it is challenged at times.

It seems, Naipaul is both, alternatively, an 'Indian' in India and a 'westerner' in India, and this fusion causes trouble. A critic on Naipaul, Chandra Chatterjee says:

Naipaul's perceptions about India are colored by an inevitable insider-outsider conflict. He moans the way that the Indians had to see themselves through European eyes to be aware of their own spirituality. (Panwar, 2007, 108)

Hence it appears that Naipaul's joy and exaltation come from his Brahmin self and his anger and negativity come from the inherent western self. So we can say that this triple identity is responsible for creating the sense of cultural displacement in him. This cultural displacement of West Indian and East Indian implies Naipaul's intellectual rejection of Indian ways and morals. It appears that he finds it difficult to eradicate it from his subconscious mind completely. This results in a conflict on the one hand

about taking an ironic stand towards East, while on the other hand, Naipaul's self perception not being accepted in West Indies frustrates him further.

The same feeling of displacement can be noticed in his popular work, *A House for Mr. Biswas* – the saga of Indian life in the Caribbean society. The career of Mr. Biswas in roughing out the obstinate substance of life in the West Indies is a testimony to an inheritance, lost but not overcome. Naipaul writes in the *The Middle Passage*:

Living by themselves in villages, the Indians were able to having a complex community life. It was world eaten up with jealousies and family feuds and village feuds but it has a world of its own, a community within the colonial society, without responsibility, with authority doubly and trebly removed. (Naipaul, 1988, 88-89)

The displaced Indian again finds himself in a complicated colonial world where life is precarious and uncertain and the individual is constantly attacked by the worst fear of being left behind. Naipaul calls Indians in Trinidad as:

A peasant minded, money minded community spiritually static because cut off from its roots, its religion reduced to rites without philosophy, set in a materialistic colonial society; a combination of historical accidents and national temperament has turned the Trinidad Indian into the complete colonial, even more philistine than the whites. (Naipaul, 1964, 43)

In this way, after discussing Naipaul's Indian Hindu Brahmin self, at times confused by his British self and also his West Indian origin by birth, we can say that Naipaul is actually twice removed from his ancestor's motherland, India. Hence his sensibility is of an expatriate. He is an expatriate in England having preferred self-exile from Trinidad. Once again he is expatriated in India, the land of his ancestors. Thus he can be considered as doubly expatriated.

To summarize we can say that Naipaul is a constant traveller in search of his own identity, journeying to India. He comes to terms with his own homelessness. So in

An Area of Darkness he says, "I had learned my separateness from India and was content to be a colonial, without the past, without ancestors." (Naipaul, 1964, 44) In this way the detachment is the only response adopted by Naipaul. Rootlessness may be inevitable for Naipaul but his best accounts are of places most firmly attached to his roots: Trinidad, the land of his birth in *The Middle Passage*, India the land of ancestors, in *An Area of Darkness* and *India: A Wounded Civilization*. So rootlessness seems to be the base of Naipaul's identity, at the same time it is also the subject matter of the most of his writing. Naipaul confesses:

To be an Indian in England was distinctive; in Egypt it was more so. Now in Bombay I entered a shop or a restaurant and awaited a special response. And there was nothing. It was like denied part of my reality. Again and again I was caught. I was faceless. I might sink without a trace into that Indian crowd. I had been made by Trinidad and England; recognition of my difference was necessary to me. I felt the need to impose myself and didn't know how. (Naipaul, 1990, 491)

This confession speaks volume on Naipaul's sensibility and obsession The above discussion is an attempt to reveal his triple identity: Naipaul's strange split sensibility of Hindu Brahmin self with his birth upbringing in the West Indies and an expatriate in London, always in search of identity in a state of homelessness.

III.6 Critical Analysis

Ever since the publication in 1964, *An Area of Darkness* has been the subject of controversy on account of direct and harsh commentary on India. Critics from India and abroad interpreted the book from different viewpoints. The Indian critical response to Naipaul's books on India, spread over the last few decades makes an interesting reading material. In the remaining part of the chapter, an attempt is made to suggest why and how it needs a further modulation to do away with the critical darkness and allow the book to illuminate it. The task is not easy because it is very

difficult to collect and study everything that has been said about the book as well as Naipaul over the years.

According to D. J. Enright, the book is strongly felt, original, compact, and hardly ever dull which makes it a rarity of a genre. (Enright, 1964, 61) For him Naipaul's failure to imbibe the spirit of India lies in his choice of an orthodox form of travelogue, rather than fiction or poetry. The book is not exactly about a journey, a country, but largely about himself, a hybrid production, part a novel, with himself as a hero, villain, at times a clown.

In the opinion of Landeg White, Naipaul is reflecting on the total experience, recognizing that he is considering a situation in which he is involved. He notes:

An Area of Darkness is polished and calculated, from the fact with which it channels its stronger criticism through quotations from Gandhi to the thoroughness with which it balances specific encounters against general commentary, glimpses from a train, against residence in Kashmir, the Indianans in himself against the India he is rejecting. (White, 1975, 21)

While reporting events, it required an altogether different stance to report with sensibility on the Indian mastery of operating between two worlds. Naipaul is at war with the subject and this irony diminishes and is ultimately, self-destructive. Further he points out:

.....the irony of *An Area of Darkness* is a kind of perspective. It allows for discovery, for a revelation of new dimensions. It returns constantly to that personal crisis which is at the heart of the experiences recorded. It depends on the fact of distancing in place and time. (White, 1975, 23)

Unlike these critics, the approach of H. Annish Gowda is remarkable. He would have been happy if Naipaul would have written about India which is not defecation. He tells us:

An Area of Darkness is a personal testament of Naipaul, a record of his personal reactions; the book has value but he is writing about himself, not India. (Gowda, 1970, 163)

He thinks that the book falls short of the idea of making people dream. It is readable but negative book about India. It is charged with prejudice and, it makes a painful reading to an Indian.

P C David, another Indian critic attempts an analysis of the book and makes an interesting reading. He begins with the assurance of taking a fresh look at the book keeping aside all criticism. He also promises not to be patriotic in the evaluation. He then says:

An Area of Darkness is a controversial book as has already been suggested in that it has evoked an amazingly diverse critical response. It has been praised by critics like John Waine who calls it 'Tender, lyrical, explosive and excellent'. It has also been critically acclaimed by some Indian writers associated with some magazines. But at the same time it has been discovered by eminent scholars and writers like Prof. C. D. Narsinhaiah and Nissim Ezekiel, both of whom have analyzed searchingly and painstakingly and exposed Naipaul's arrogance, lack of sympathy, his desire to try always to fit things into his own scheme, his failure to find his identity in India and many other things which apparently dilate the artistic impact of the book. (David, 1981, 232)

Hence P. C. David tries to reveal that Naipaul begins his journey from the realm of darkness, with an attitude of ambivalence, hoping to feel the conceived India of a romantic reverie which cannot stand the glare of the day.

Among the critics against Naipaul's approach, Nissim Ezekiel is the one with a typical article to his credit. In his long review, he goes on to quoting Naipaul's negative comments on India, which express Naipaul's inherent feeling about India and Indians.

Ezekiel notes, "Naipaul's India is peopled, packed with a kind of life which is death, a negative distortion and degradation from which he is glad finally to escape." Ezekiel over and over again calls Naipaul rubbish. He seems to be determined to prove Naipaul wrong in his judgments on India.

Ezekiel is in contrast with Naipaul in the following points. In Naipaul's India, "the clerk will not bring you a glass of water even if you faint".(Ezekiel, 1974, 141) For Ezekiel a clerk will do virtually anything for you if he is treated humanely Ezekiel also considers the story of American woman worthless in a book. He thinks that this kind of female fantasy might suit to Naipaul's pen. Ezekiel feels that the lady was unbalanced, disagreeably foolish and unsympathetic. The long story of the steno Ramnath happens in India of Naipaul. In Ezekiel's India stenographers type out the letters dictated to them. He refutes the point of beggary by saying that beggars will disappear from India when economic progress will make begging unnecessary in India.

3.6 *An Area of Darkness- A Classical Case of Misinterpretation?*

Immediately after its publication, the then Indian government imposed a ban on it. In the West it was hailed as a scathing but truthful vision. It appears to be misinterpreted in the west as well as in India. It was strictly not a travelogue as Paul Theroux declares on the cover of its penguin edition, "A master piece of travel-writing...wise, original." Likewise it was not, "darkness, packed with a kind of life which is death, a negation, a distortion and degradation from which he is glad finally to escape". (Ezekiel, 1974, 130), it seems to be the meeting ground of an 'insider' and an 'outsider' in his homeland.

Naipaul's engagement with India is not one way process. It appears to be complicated case of action and reaction being recorded against a background that is equally complicated.

Naipaul has written of his idea of his Hindu-Brahmin self that survived as a small area of 'self-deception'. He has recorded that he had been brought up in a double world: the closed Hindu world of his grandmother's family and the outside world. Both these worlds were separate and secreted from each other. In the similar fashion

Naipaul's two selves of an 'insider' and 'outsider' separated and reacted differently to situations at hand.

It was likely to be a double struggle for Naipaul in *An Area of Darkness*. It seems to be the struggle to establish a perspective to find the meaning of India; at the same time it appears to be a struggle to discover the process through which the meaning could be unravelled.

The book ends in ambivalence. There could not have been any other possible ending. Though the book is full of commentary of darkness about India, as Naipaul defined in the beginning, it is that aspect of India or that aspect of Indian sensibility which remains impenetrable for him. The area of light is the area of his "experience, in time and place." (Naipaul, 1964, 30) Naipaul has expressed in his own words that he has been unable to express his briefly grasped understanding of the philosophy that is at the heart of India. He says:

I felt it as something true which I could never adequately express and never seize again. (Naipaul, 1964, 266)

The value of *An Area of Darkness* is that the book and its critics have documented various aspects of India. Never before was India presented through a diasporic vision. Never before was so much talk had been made by the critics about the commentary to be right or wrong about India. There is no potent thesis about India which can help us to scale the opinions of Naipaul about India. The book describes the problematic relations of Naipaul with India, so it is full of confusion and contradiction. We notice frequent notes of the writer's identification with India at a personal level. He never wants India 'to sink', so he returns with more books on India, attempting to analyze its problems.

* * *

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