

Chapter VI

Conclusion

It seems that Naipaul's writings are inextricably linked with his personal experience and no study on Naipaul can be considered without taking into account the formative forces behind his literary talent. One such major force was the Hindu-India of the Caribbean in which he was born and brought up. His grandmother's house provided the first link with his Hindu self and with the India of his ancestors. Naipaul grew up with a highly eulogized idea of India. Although he did not understand much about the tenets of Hinduism and rituals of his grandmother's house, there was always something sacred in the very idea of India. He was next introduced to the idea of the Hindu India of his father's stories, which epitomized for him the unity of the old world. As he grew up, it appears that Naipaul observed a chasm between the two worlds that he inhabited. One was the colonial world of Trinidad and the other was the old Hindu world. At the beginning of his career, Naipaul attempted to block out his experience of his own society. However he realized that it was out of this experience that his writings would evolve, and so he returned to draw on his experiences. The same pattern emerges in Naipaul's engagement with India in his three books that have been discussed in this thesis.

Naipaul's first book on India *An Area of Darkness* was the outcome of his first face-to-face encounter with India. India, so far, had been to him only an idea---an idea that he had inherited in Trinidad. When faced with the actuality of India, its distress and pain affected Naipaul more strongly than its newly won independence. He could not catch the dominant nationalistic spirit of those times and instead wrote a very personal account of his experiences and disappointments. The India of his dreams, the India of his grandfather was lost forever. Naipaul marked the areas that created unrest in him. He witnessed the areas of pain and squalor of futile mimicry and of degeneration. He also noted the co-existence of opposite and incongruous sensibilities in people. I have tried to show that *An Area of Darkness* marks his perplexity, his rage

and his inability to comprehend the India that meets his eye or its relation to the India of Trinidad.

Amidst the volatile responses generated by *An Area of Darkness* certain aspects of Naipaul's sensibility were overlooked. These aspects were the areas wherein Naipaul experienced genuine concern for all that was innocent and uncorrupted in India. Such responses lie scattered throughout the book largely ignored by critics and readers. It seems that these areas constitute the genesis for Naipaul's recurrent concerns with India.

Naipaul's second book on India, *India: A Wounded Civilization* marks the second stage in the progression of his engagement with India. The book is Naipaul's exposition of the problems of India. Here, the areas that Naipaul had visited in *An Area of Darkness* are subjected to extensive scrutiny and he tries to discover the causes behind the pain and squalor and deficiencies of India. Naipaul identifies one major cause that is at the root of all maladies that ail India: a deep rupture was caused in the people's idea of themselves by repeated invasions and conquests. The traditional knowledge and talent was systematically destroyed, and with the coming of the British, there occurred the final rupture in the sensibilities of the people. Traditional skills and craftsmanship died out. Alien institutions, according to Naipaul, were forced on the people and traditional institutions were so completely destroyed that even after independence, India could not produce even a fragment of the talent, knowledge and expertise that it had possessed in the past.

But then, Naipaul does not stop with the critique of foreign rule. He goes on to hunt for the causes from within the Indian fabric that were responsible for India's predicament, and comes up with the following conclusions. The concept of nationhood was totally alien to India as India had so far been divided into several kingdoms, big or small. Mahatma Gandhi mobilized the people of India to an idea of unity by invoking the age-old Indian concept of *dharma*. He infused new meaning in the ideals of service and sacrifice in such a way that the struggle for independence cut across caste and class barriers. Independence was won but the idea of self-governance did not reach the masses. The nameless millions, who had walked behind Gandhi, now returned to their

individual worlds and personal interests. Gandhi thus remained only a symbol. Gandhianism became ritualized and lost its ideological content. Indian leadership continued to work on the old British patterns; the British institutions continued to function. However, Naipaul does not record development at those places where he observes a change in the people at the grass-root level. He does not also notice development that the creation of industries brought about in the lives of the people. By giving the landless poor an alternative to their unending indebtedness and poverty, the industries created people, who had a new sense of the self and a new morality. In this movement, at the bottom of the social ladder, lay Naipaul's hope for the regeneration of India.

Naipaul's third book on India, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* shows one more engagement of Naipaul with India. In this book, Naipaul has analyzed and explained the constructions of his own first response to India. The book is a picture gallery of India. Naipaul has observed India at those places from where regeneration and growth have begun. The book follows a pattern: Individuals are observed; their opinions are recorded and placed against those of earlier generation. In this way Naipaul traces the process of development. Each character is shown in the capacity in which he has negotiated change and invested in the development. By holding these characters against their parents or grandparents, Naipaul shows positive growth and changes. Naipaul has also stressed the steady change in the lives of Indian women. Throughout the book, Naipaul has observed womanhood in various walks of life and also the subtle ways in which women have begun to assert themselves. Naipaul also observes the double burden of the home and the workplace that the new Indian woman has to carry. In *India: A Million Mutinies*, Naipaul has recorded a series of voices that proclaim that India is on the move. Naipaul's own voice is mainly restricted to the first and last few pages of the book.

These three books on India fall into a pattern, and need to be read in relation to the forces at work within Naipaul, the person and Naipaul, the writer. In this respect, a critic on Naipaul, Suvir Kaul says:

Those who carefully read Naipaul learnt that each of his books was in some way connected to his project of writerly self-discovery and self-definition, and that in each case the mimic man that Naipaul describes and denigrates is a fearfully imagined version of his protean colonial and migrant self. (Mehrotra, 2003, 240)

Had Naipaul restricted himself to empirical observations on India, these books could have been read as commentaries on India. But that is not so; Naipaul has taken these books out of the personal realm of commentary by referring to the interiority of his own experience. He has analyzed his personal responses to India in terms of his experiences in Trinidad, in terms of his cultural inheritance in his grandmother's house, in terms of his anxieties and fears for his own identity. Therefore the only complete perspective that can be adopted for viewing these books can be one which takes both of the above mentioned factors into account. The diasporic perspective performs this double function and the book can thus be studied as a diasporic writer's attempt to establish a link with the land of his ancestors.

Criticism of Naipaul's narratives, specially the criticism from India, plays a major role in creating the broader understanding of Naipaul's vision. Naipaul, for Indians is an 'outsider', who cannot be given the right to an insider's knowledge of the country. The outsider ought to be content with observing the glories of India. The very fact that this outsider decides to enter their very personal world of defeat and degeneration is enough to put the insiders on the offensive. The thrust of the attack is not so much on what Naipaul observes but on why he chooses to observe the obvious poverty of India. He is attacked for keeping a hidden agenda of lambasting India in his books to win acclaim in the west. The western scholars and critics complicate the matter further by lauding Naipaul for his keen and accurate vision of the problems of India and for his unsentimental approach. This created further resistance among Indian scholars and it seems that in the cacophony of attacks and counter-attacks, the content of Naipaul's words was lost. His criticism of India was not brought to light. The role of the construction of the writer's sensibility was altogether neglected.

Therefore, Naipaul's books on India demand a double discernment. Naipaul is to be read in relation to his diasporic status and also in relation to his world vision, which had trained him to look for fissures and lacunae in societies and sensibilities. Before he came to India, he had already evolved his own method of literary exposition of the predicament of the world. His method was that of scathing critique, which he adopted in *An Area of Darkness*. Also at work in *An Area of Darkness* was the confirmation of his rootlessness. He had never felt rooted in Trinidad, he had grown up to believe that his roots lay in far off India—the sacred land that his grandfather came from. He expected India to be a pastoral land of a fairy tale. This first book therefore is a very personal book. It appears to be a cry of rage, an attempt to retreat from a reality that is painful. Naipaul's grandfather while leaving India for Trinidad had not carried the tales of Indian poverty and pain with him. The reason why he had to indenture himself was never mentioned and in his grandmother's house in Trinidad, there were no signs of this indentured past. Naipaul's grandfather had carried with him fairy tales of India as a golden land. This kind of selective amnesia is not uncommon in diasporic communities. Naipaul inherited it. This was the main reason why *An Area of Darkness* comes up as a rather confused response to India.

In *India: A Wounded Civilization* there appears to be change to a great extent. It is the outcome of Naipaul's declaration in *An Area of Darkness* that he did not want to sink. The analysis of the problems of India contained in *India: A Wounded Civilization* attempts not only to condemn the devastating enterprise of India's conquerors but also to create a feeling that all is not over yet. That India will go on only if certain things are rectified. With this purpose, Naipaul presents his analysis. What he is actually trying to say is not India but his idea of India that *An Area of Darkness* had threatened to take away. Having done that, Naipaul comes out with yet another book, which is very different from the first two. *India: A Million Mutinies* is his attempt to establish the long lost connection with India. He is now an insider because the dirt or the distress that he sees does not throw him into a spasm of revulsion. He can stand and look beyond what strikes the eye. The squatters' settlements are no longer breeding grounds of disease

but areas of mutinies that add momentum to India's journey towards change and promise of growth.

The whole unconscious working of the diasporic consciousness is laid out in Naipaul's works and comments on India. Naipaul's comment on India during his visit last winter elucidates this. In 1900, in *India: A Million Mutinies* he wrote that his own lack of understanding generated his reactions:

What I hadn't understood in 1962, or had taken too much for granted, was the extent to which the country had been remade; and even the extent to which India had been restored to itself....(Naipaul, 1990, 602)

Ten years later on a visit to India, he made the following comment on the intellectual growth in India:

There is kind of intellectual life now that didn't exist in 1960's. India is on the verge of immense intellectual development, I think, in every field. (Bhatia Shyam, 2000)

This is a classic example of Naipaul the person and Naipaul the writer, playing hide and seek with each other's experience. It points at the subtle and unconscious ways in which diasporic consciousness works in the interior landscape of the writer's mind. Physical proximity with the situation is no guarantee for directness of experience. It cannot be a measuring rod for authenticity of vision. Vision cannot be limited to the duration of experience either. Vision depends on the perspective. With the reshaping that occurred as a result of Imperial rule, the old world unity of vision was shattered and multiple perspectives were generated. It is therefore obvious that perspectives on India would also be different and varied. The resistance generated by Naipaul's vision in India is a clear example of the extent to which the Indian fabric has been wounded. In any perspective that threatens to shatter our idea of ourselves, we see a potential threat to our culture and civilization. Naipaul criticism in India has its own role in exposing the working of the diasporic consciousness in Naipaul. Both follow the same pattern of attempting to block out the experience that threatens the

unity of the self. Naipaul attempted to block out India in his first book and India attempted to block out Naipaul. Today both stand changed. Naipaul has progressed towards a better understanding of India and Indian scholars and critics are revising their views on Naipaul. It is a process of coming to terms from both sides. Naipaul has been very candid about this process of writing:

So step by step, book by book, though seeking each time only to write another book, I eased myself into knowledge. To write was to learn. Beginning a book, I always felt I was in position of all the facts about myself; at the end I was always surprised. The book before always turned out to have been written by a man with incomplete knowledge. (Naipaul, 1985, 27-28)

It seems that Naipaul's three books on India record the above process, not only in sensibility but also in style.

An Area of Darkness is full of Naipaul's own comments and reactions. The 'I' of the writer is predominant; *India: A Wounded Civilization* changes this. The text is analytical and arguments are conducted on the basis of what meets the eye rather than what strikes the heart. The style and language also changed accordingly. In *India: A Million Mutinies*, this style is embellished to perfection. The text records directly the voices and experiences of the people Naipaul meets. The writer's observations are reduced to bare minimum. The voices speak for themselves and the judgment is left open to the reader. The writer not only steps back but also explains the cause behind his reactions in his earlier books. In this book the tone is analytical and expository. Thus Naipaul's books on India present a record of the development of his sensibilities and concerns and the corresponding development of his style.

Naipaul's value in our present world is that of a writer who works amidst the fragmented parts of our history. Over a period of time he has brought to focus our past and present through his own unique vision. His is not static record but one that progresses and grows through each book. His status as a diasporic writer, and the problematic fissure it created in his Indian sensibility, has recorded for posterity the

deep psychological violence caused by the colonial rule and its legacies of confusion, alienation and psychological exile which the world has to continue to live with.

Critics hold divergent views on Naipaul and the number of judgments passed on him are equally numerous. Naipaul continues in spite of those. It appears that his only guiding light is his own vision. He has a purpose in what he writes and his being truthful to no vision or idea other than his own makes his enterprise more historically relevant. The past needs to be shaken out of its role of the psychological feel-good resort for bruised reality. Naipaul advocates a critical analysis of the past and for this the past has to be always kept in view while the present is being worked on.

No study on Naipaul and India will be complete without a discussion of the political side of Naipaul's engagement with India. Throughout the course of his encounters with India beginning with *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul has refused to be contained within the political correct boundaries that have, of late, come to be assigned to creative writers and intellectuals. The latest example is the way in which the scholars and intellectuals have allowed the Narmada issue to fizzle out and the way in which the media has dealt with the intellectual commitment of people like Medha Patkar and Arundhati Roy. Naipaul's comments on Indian politics are highly charged. By opening a debate on the way we perceive our history and politics. Naipaul has sent across waves of shock among our politicians and journalists who hold a monopoly over political opinion. Pre-independence times are replete with examples of what intellectual commitment can do for a society. Ironically, post-independence times reverberate with the surprising silence of the intellectuals. It is unfortunate that Naipaul's debate is left to the journalists to report and to the politicians who distort it to suit their election propaganda.

Naipaul's opinions are his own but they arise out of a sense of commitment. It is a pity that intellectual commitment has been sidelined and no academic debates emerge out of the ideas generated by those few intellectuals who still choose to voice them. Naipaul's opinions and comments are an example of his continuing intellectual commitment. His changing comments on Hindu nationalism show a progression in the development of his understanding of the use of Hinduism in national politics. Naipaul

is a chronicler of our present times. He accepts ideas and ideologies in the form of the present connotations that these have acquired. His books on India should be accepted as diasporic chronicles that attempt to link the past to the present in ways that lead to a progression in his diasporic concerns for India.

The scope of present study is limited to the Indian perspective in the selected travelogues of V.S. Naipaul. However, there is ample scope to study all the travelogues of V.S. Naipaul from other different perspectives such as socio-political concerns, religious fundamentalism, diasporic sensibility and such others for further research. The researcher humbly accepts that his study is not absolute. So, even the same aspect can be dealt with more details and analysis further.

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