

V.S.Naipaul as a Postcolonial traveller

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ABSTRACT

V.S.Naipaul is a great novelist, short-story writer, historian, essayist and travel-writer whose writing career spans more than 50 years in which he has won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001 and many prestigious awards and literary honors. He is one of the greatest Caribbean writers of Indian origin, writing in English. As a novelist he is an international figure and exceptional. He is fond of travelling and has been keen observer of the different cultures and geographical situations and chosen it as a best suitable form to satisfy his quest of creative writing. His writing reflects various aspects and any particular culture including social, political, religious and personal belief systems. V. S. Naipaul's life and career go side by side. He travels to different places not with an objective to reach far-off countries but to see life in a new way. Naipaul chose travelogues not to reach remote destinations only for the sake of his interest in travelling but to strike a balance to give authenticated details as he found the fiction an inadequate vehicle to express authenticity of events and dialogue-delivery. Travelogue is a genre of historically realistic fictional work, more than a tourist guide and is certainly more than a graphic record of the places and personal impressions of the sojourner. I have selected some postcolonial novels of Naipaul to explore his postcolonial experiences of travelling .

Keywords: travelogue, Postcolonial, Cultural, Discourse, colonizer, colonized

Travel writing as postcolonial discourse or the postcolonial travelogue has emerged as one of the most original and fecund offshoots in the late-twentieth century. This research paper examines V.S.Naipaul's travel books *A House for Mr. Biswas*(1961), *The Middle Passage*(1962), *An Area of Darkness*(1964), *The Mimic Men*(1967) and *India: A Wounded Civilization*(1977) as postcolonial travelogues. Travel writing has become a powerful vehicle of cultural critique specifically in the hands of postcolonial authors. The nature of the pattern of a travelogue is determined by the personality of the writer. V.S. Naipaul is a zealous traveller, like Hakluyt, Marco Polo, Darwin, Defoe and so many other sailors and sojourners; he has travelled far and wide. His travel writing exhibits various aspects in the light of history, ethnography, sociology, aggression, concern for weak, sympathy for sufferers and his grand evaluation of men, manners, objects and development of a country. He has been one of the greatest Caribbean writers of Indian origin, writing in English. As a novelist he is an international figure and exceptional.

Travel is movement, movement through territorialized spaces, movement by those who choose to move and those who are moved by forces not under their control. Travel thus means by crossing

cultural boundaries, trespassing and visiting. Travel writing has been represented as diabolic by postcolonial critics. The genre of travel writing promptly connected with Edward Said's term Colonial Discourse as it is believed that this genre shares a deep connection with colonialism. The main purpose of travel writing is to bring forth dispersed discourses of polarity, dissimilitude and disaccord which was used as a verbal regretful acknowledgement by the west to sunjugate and establish political control. The practice of travel writing, and reading of travel books, was indistinguishably interlinked with the formulation and preservation of European imperialism. Travel and its derivative travel writing were both enabled by and essential to, both cause and effect of, the project of imperial growth.

Vidyadhar Suraj Prasad Naipaul was born in 1932 in an Indian Brahmin family at Chaguanas. His father named See Prasad was a journalist and his mother was a housewife. He was educated at Queens Royal College, Port of Spain Trinidad then he went to England on a scholarship. He did graduation from Oxford University. He got married to Patricia Hale in 1955 and settled down in Wiltshire, England and this marriage lasted for 41 years till the death of Patricia in 1996 and Naipaul married Nadira Khannum Alvi, a former Pakistani journalist. V.S. Naipaul's all works including fiction and non-fiction deal with the themes of disintegration, social sequence and conception of the world. His all works are too complex to understand because they are authentic and thought-provoking. Naipaul's travelogues are tour de force and are distinctive response to the difficulties of Third World countries. Travel writing for him is not only a psychological venture but also are human real reports. His journey to different places became a new base of benefaction. Travelling to Trinidad, Islamic countries, India and South America opened up new avenues of real experience and explorations with keen observations. His all travelogues are the solid evidences of his keen curiosity and deep concern to understand the Third World countries. The incongruity and polarity between West and Third World convinced him to move far and wide. His fiction and non-fiction work is governed by places such as Caribbean, India, Argentina, Pakistan, the Congo, the American South and others in which he comes out with conclusion that barbarism controlling civilization. His all writing is marked by a incessant enquiry of the fortune of postcolonial societies. V.S. Naipaul considers that fiction and travelogue are two significant ways to perceive the world. The early phase of his career provides information about many fictions about the Caribbean world but after *A House for Mr. Biswas*, his writing reached to a gridlock and then he tried his skill in travelogue. As a result a new style of writing not only broaden his range of vision but also widen his writing content. This genre prepared him to perceive the world beyond the Caribbean world.

The postcolonial discourse of the nation has provided multifarious issues to the front side. The discourse which was used by postcolonial writers is continuously expanding. The postcolonial world has been afflicted by travels in various ways; those countries which were colonised and in debate were travelled over, reinvented, vanquished or taken up by the people who were brought from Europe. Dislocation and separation from native place are chiefly connected with the postcolonial conditions and many others perceive as it incorporates a history of transportation, displacement, migration, exile and diaspora.

Naipaul is a writer of remarkable expertise through which he transforms his traveling experience into texts, primarily postcolonial texts. His texts are not merely precise records of his physical visits but also a sort of circulation of colonial past of colonial countries actively as Barbara Korte remarks: "If travel is of special pertinence to Britain's former colonies, the travel writing produced in these parts of the world has been practically ignored by scholars until recently with the prominent exception of V.S. Naipaul." (English Travel 152)

V.S. Naipaul has a unique place among the post-independence travellers because of his mysterious connection with the country. It is a very queer plight that agitation arising from Naipaul's

aspiration to stand apart from the prevailing tradition of the country visited. As a result, he registers some critical travel writings which are suggestive, emotive and eccentric in nature. This research paper is an impartial narrative of Naipaul's emotions that has incited in him the colossal, enigmatic and afflicted country and he inscribes his disturbing and distressing thoughts in Indian trilogy to explore a postcolonial India. The paper analyses Naipaul's experiences in a chronological manner.

Naipaul's first return to Caribbean is *The Middle Passage* (1962) that is a travel book in which he expresses his disappointment with what he views in Trinidad no culture,

"Though we knew something was wrong with our society, we made no attempt to assess it. Trinidad was too unimportant and we could never be convinced of the value of reading the history of a place which was, as everyone said, only a dot on the map of the world. Our interest was all on the world outside, the remoter the better; Australia was more important than Venezuela, which we could see on a clear day" (MP 36).

The character of Naipaul's another novel *Mimic Men*, Ralph Singh writes memoir to search his place and identity,

"He realizes that his experiences and his feeling of abandonment and displacement cannot be separated from his colonial backgrounds" (MM 50).

When he goes to London to negotiate with Lord Stockwell about labour problems and sugar estate, then Stockwell refuses even to talk seriously with him. He considers him a child and says that he has got nice hair. He is badly humiliated by him and the minister, "You can take back to your people any message you like" (MM 224).

From the heart, Singh was alienated from the society and this incident was a true loss for him, "My sense of drama failed. This to me was the true loss. For four years drama had supported me; now, abruptly, drama failed. It was a private loss ..." (MM 221).

Ralph Singh travels to different places to give him some solace from his feeling of loneliness and isolation but he is unable to forget his 'imminent homelessness' (MM 249). The two novels *Half a Life* and its sequel *Magic Seeds* are about an Indian immigrant's quest for home in India, Africa and England. In these two works Naipaul explores and questions why people are prone to settle abroad why they not feel at home when they get chances to settle there. The issue of hybridity, cultural clash and socio-economical problem has been posed by these works. Naipaul's characters, like him, are to some extent 'victims of colonization' and that's why the terms displacement, dislocation, rootlessness, placelessness, cultural denigration etc. can summarily be used in context with his works. Naipaul and his characters remain in the state of in-betweenness and they are unable to raise their voice against imperialism which makes them placeless and rootless. On this Said contends,

"The state of being in-between things ...that cannot come together for him; he wrote from the ironic point of view of the failure to which he seems to have been resigned" (Said 87).

An Area of Darkness (1964) is another travelogue through which Naipaul records his impressions of first visit to India. In giving details he lacks depths in some aspects under observation. His main objective of this journey is to discover his Indian identity because for any writer a strict identity is very significant factor especially if s/he is considered an outsider. This journey leaves a mark on his writings. His first visit to his native place is actually a journey to explore his roots from where his grandfather had displaced to Trinidad as an indentured labourer. Bombay is the first place visited by him but it was not as he had expected. He dislikes to be a part of a crowd at Church station and expected special treatment that he always got in Trinidad and England. But he found no special attention in India. The Chinese attack on India in 1962 put the entire country in crisis. Naipaul was not much concerned about this though he was then in India. Nehru's serious fault, inappropriate war against the China fills Naipaul with aggression and he gives bitter satiric remarks in his chapter on Emergency.

He witnessed hollowness all around in the land and it made him quite distressed on the failure of Mr. Nehru.

Besides the above mentioned postcolonial events, another aspect of India that Naipaul confronted was the caste system and he condemns the strict hierarchy of the caste system in India and with distress states, "...in India caste was unpleasant; I never wished to know what a man's caste was..."(29)

Naipaul's second book on India is *India: A Wounded Civilisation*(1977) that records all political upheavels of the decade of 1970s. Naipaul, as a postcolonial traveller failed to establish his Indian identity and withdrew himself from making efforts after his first visit to India. Naipaul realised after his first visit to India that this place could not be his home but he could not remain unmoved and detached from it. Naipaul's second visit to India brought in his mind that Indians would take long time to understand that Britishers left India and he sees no freedom of Indians and what he sets his eyes on post-independence India and states:

"But Independent India, with its five-year plans, its industrialization, its practice of democracy, has invested in change. There was always a contradiction between the archaism of national pride and the promise of the new; the contradiction has at last cracked the civilization open." (India 8)

For Naipaul India at that point of time was a third world country without a historical and racial sense and he proposes that India has to cut off all connections with its past to get the best out of its present. He states that India should be assessed only in the Indian way and in comparison with any western country:

"The world outside India was to be judged by its own standards. India was not to be judged. India was only to be experienced, in the Indian way." (90)

This fact cannot be refuted that nobody can replace Naipaul in writing and giving visual descriptions of common people. His selection of themes, characters, ability to provide historical accounts always hit the nail on the head.

Naipaul's one more book *India: A Million Mutinies* gives his account of postcolonial experiences. This book shares the notion of home coming. After coming back to India Naipaul perceives million mutinies of castes, of class and of gender. His use of the word 'mutinies' in the title of his book indicates that his writings still have tensions of the colonial discourse. In this novel he has very nicely painted the postcolonial picture of India. Political turbulences have confounded India intermittently in post independence India. Though Naipaul was not in India at that time but he gathers all the required information from primary and secondary sources such as people, newspaper and others. In 1962 Naipaul visited India but he was not aware about political set of India but when he visited for the second time he narrated the period of Emergency very precisely. His vision became more clear with his third visit to India and he was a keen observant and inquisitive about such movements which created diversions in daily life of Indian people. Naipaul always talks in favour of India and its mutinies. The sensitive description vision of Naipaul enables him to reproduce the theme of disintegrated and disordered India before reaching a final integration. It is his intellectual brilliance to focus upon the sense of life in a rebellious spirit and that is a remarkable aspect of Naipaul's writing. Even in the middle of clear tumult and commotion he perceives a progression, integrity and consonance. Thus, the million mutinies represents the inception of a post-colonial society for Naipaul. This book has brought forward a new perception of Naipaul to light but contradictory elements of his identity cannot be ignored which are responsible for his growth and attainment of unrevealed reality he

CONCLUSION

Naipaul's obsession for travelling led him to many countries of the world. His interest in these places is

implicit from his persistence in writing travelogues and short-stories. V. S. Naipaul harbours cultural discontent and disillusionment and his narratives that disclose such cultural prejudices - a product most often of cultural shock-are chosen as texts for further examination.

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