



THE NON-FICTIONS OF V.S.NAIPAUL: A CRITICAL EXPLORATION

Dr. Amar Nath Prasad

Professor & Head
Department of English
Jagdam College (J.P.University)
Chapra (Bihar)

Dr. Daisy Kumari

Mahaveer Sthan
Katahari Bag, Chapra (Bihar)

ABSTRACT

V.S.Naipaul is an eminent literary figure in the field of modern fiction, non-fiction and travelogue writing in English literature. He earned a number of literary awards and accolades including the coveted Nobel Prize and Booker Prize. His non fictions e.g; *An Area of Darkness*, *India : A Wounded Civilization*, *The Loss of El Dorado*, *India : A Million Mutinies Now* and *Beyond Belief* are the realistic portrayal of the various types of religion, culture, customs and people of India. As an author, the main purpose of V.S.Naipaul is to deliver the truth; because poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind. The truth which V.S.Naipaul has presented in his non fictions is more authentic and realistic than that of his fictions. Nonetheless it is fictional works which is elaborately explored, discussed and analysed in abundance. On the other hand, his non-fictions, by and far, remain aloof. In the last few decades, non-fictions are also taking the ground strongly. Now non-fiction writings are being analysed, elucidated and explored on the basis of various theoretical principles of literary criticism.

V.S.Naipaul carried the new genre to new heights and achievements. He is from Indian descent known for his pessimistic works set in developing countries. Like Pearl S.Buck and E.M.Forster, he visited India several times. So, his presentation of Indian religion, society, culture and politics is very realistic. His vision and ideas are very close to the modern thoughts and visions of both the east and the west.

Keywords: Non-fiction, *An Area of Darkness*, *India : A Wounded Civilization*, *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, Cultural Growth and Hegemony, Religious beliefs, Historical Perspectives.

Our paper is concerned with the brief introduction of the famous non-fictions of V.S.Naipaul. Naipaul wrote three non-fictional works related to India, his ancestral land. He came to India several times and whatever he has seen, felt and experienced gave the shape of three important books about India. They are:- *An Area of Darkness* (1964),



India: A Wounded Civilization (1977) India: A Million Mutinies Now. All these books present a very realistic and beautiful portrayal of the contemporary society, politics, religion, culture and people. He has also written two books related to Islamic Society—Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey. (1981) and Beyond Belief: Inslamic Excursion (1998). Apart from all these things about his ancestral home, Islamic society, London life he never forgot his birth that is the Carribean island. His books The Middle Passages, Impression of Five Societies-British, French, and the Dutch in the West Indias and South America (1962) and Lost of El Dorado: A History (1980) deal with the theme of Caribbean Island. His two collection of essays—The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Articles (1972) and The Return of Era Person (1980) deal with the Caribbean people and their society. His recent works are Literary Ocasion (2004) and A Writer's People: Ways of Looking and Feeling (2007) show his literary talent and poetic craftsmanship. About V.S.Naipaul and his themes of writings, Prof. R. A. Singh rightly observes:

His reoccurring themes include the collision of different cultures, the psychopathology of colonialism, and the internal motivations of the individual that lead to the formation of interpersonal connections. He portrays a person who is having difficulty coping with the circumstances in which he is placed and the method in which he manages to do so. Because of this challenge, he could be able to solve it, but he might also fail. Because of this, the fiction written by Naipaul takes on a framework that is not just historical but also social and psychological. Because of this, we may say that Naipaul is not just a chronicler but also a historian and a biographer.

V.S.Naipaul got his early education at Queens' Royal College in Trinidad. During his studies he succeeded in getting the government scholarships for getting higher education from England. Consequently he went to England for his further studies at University College, Oxford. From the very beginning of his life he has a strong passion for writing. This passion came from his father who was also associated with writings. Naturally V.S.Naipaul worked as a correspondent for British Broadcasting Corporation. He also worked an an editor of the 'Carribean Voices' programme from B.B.C. Though he lived in England but his heart always longed for this birth place Trinidad. He was very much connected his root. During his stay in England he wrote several memorable literature. His first work was Mystic Masseur published in 1957.



This book won the John Llewellyn Rhys prize in 1958. This book was also adopted as a film in 2001. Naipaul was also interested in short story writing. 'Miguel Street' which was published in 1959 as a collection of short stories. This book won the Somerset Mangham Award. His famous novel *A House For Mr. Biswas*, a bit autobiographical deals with the life of his father in Trinidad. His other novel 'Mr. Stone and the Knight's Companions', published in 1963 and got the Ha-Thornden Prize. His other novel *The Mimic Men* (1967) which won the W.H.Smith Literary Award deals with a political theme. His other consequent novel *In A Free State* (1971) *Guerrillas* (1975) and *A Bend in the River*, (1979) are also related to the political theme and the indicasies and complexities of politics. The central theme of these novels are related with the African people, their rights, customs, convention and cultures.

V.S.Naipaul is a prolific writer of fictional and non fictional work. Through his extraordinary style of writing he continues to provoke, excite and surprise the readers by dint of his literary voyage. What matters most in his writings is the illuminating perspective and the exploration into this rich fascinating world. In his travelogue writings he is more serious, studious and sympathetic towards India. He found a great difference between India of his imagination and India encountered in reality.

An Area of Darkness describes Naipaul's journey to India. He travelled North to Kashmir, East to Calcutta and South to Madras. In these various places he saw several people and interacted with them. His observations about the customs, conventions, rites and culture of India was very harsh and critical. His observations are also very impartial and unbiased. India about which the traveller writer had dreamt of from his childhood had fascination for his ancestral homeland. But in India he found a big paradox between the portrayal of his darkness about India and the country existed in reality. But unfortunately whatever he had cherished in his mind about the Indian people, culture and civilization, he did not find in reality the same thing. Naipaul says :

"To me as a child the India that had produced so many of the persons and things around me was featureless, and I thought of the time when the transference was made as a period of darkness, darkness which also extended to the land, as darkness surrounds a hut at evening, though for a little way around the hut there is still light. The light was the area of my experience, in time and place. And even now, though time has widened, though space has contracted and I have travelled lucidly over that area which was to me



the area of darkness, something and darkness remains, in those attitudes, those ways of thinking and seeing.” (An Area of Darkness, 30)

In *An Area of Darkness*, he pokes fun at a number of different Hindu customs and rituals. His perspective appears to be that of a person who does not believe in anything or an iconoclast. He casts irony on the thread ritual, which Naipaul refers to as a "theatre," and yet, as a brahmin somewhere lurking within him, he is unable to approve of the modifications that are being made to the old cult. He attempts to investigate India in 1962 while having such a fractured mentality, and as a result, he is unable to provide an accurate depiction of India at that period of time. In point of fact, he was in the midst of a very transitional phase during his time in India. As a result, he was unable to paint an accurate picture of India or get at the true nature of the situation regarding India. It's possible that this is why, by the time he gets to the conclusion of the book, he realises that he'll never be able to convey the real spirit of India. He says:

“It was only now, as my experience of India defined itself properly against my homelessness that saw how close in the past year I had been to the total Indian negation, how much it had become the basis of thought and feeling. And already with this, in a world where illusion could only be a concept and not something felt in the bones, it was slippery never adequately expressed and seized again.” (An Area, 114)

An Area of Darkness in both theme and technique is very near to Joseph Conrad's famous novel *Heart of Darkness*. In this novel Conrad presents a very realistic picture of the Jungle in Congo Basin where everything is uncivilized, savage and dark. It is their darkness that they are always seen exploited and ruled by colonisers. In the name of reformation and development of the country the colonisers rob the rich natural resources of the ignorant tribals and this they make their country richer and richer. Similar in *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul also presents an uncivilized, savage and dark country like India. In other words, this book also presents his insatiable search for his identity and belongingness. The last paragraph of the book shows the pain and experience which Naipaul has felt during his visit to his land of forefathers :

“The world is illusion, the Hindu say. We talk of despair, but true despair lies too deep for formulation. It was only now, as my experience of India itself more properly against my own homelessness that I saw how close in the past year I had been to the total



Indian negation, how much it had become the basis of thought and feeling. And already, with this awareness, in a world where illusion could only be a concept and not something felt in the bones, it was slipping away from me. I felt it as something true which I could never adequately express and never seize again.” (An Area, 266)

India : A Wounded Civilization is the other significant travelogue of V.S.Naipaul. The phrase wounded in this title is very suggestive. It suggests the several invasions and infiltration of the tyrants to India. In this book Naipaul does not find any merit in Gandhian ideology. According to Naipaul, Gandhian political thought and economic policy have some certain serious limitations. The truth which Naipaul has presented in this travelogue is very honest which India must realise her weakness. This book also shows Naipaul’s aversion to the leaders who opposed emergency and challenged Mrs. Indira Gandhi. He was of the opinion that these leaders opposed Mrs. Gandhi because they wanted to attain power. He also says that India has committed several mistakes in the past but in spite of various mistakes and falls she remained slave in chains for centuries. Ravi K. Jha rightly observes :

Naipaul considers that ‘Emergency’ is not an issue for discussion in making of Indian civilization. He has extracted the fundamental weakness of Indian civilization. The borrowed institutions of India like press, democracy and judicial system have become dysfunctional which the nation Indian brought from the West. Most of the issues raised by Naipaul are pertaining to religious, cultural, political, economic and historical matter. All these issues are yet to be addressed amicably. India will have to strive hard to solve these issues honestly. (Jha, R.K., Preface)

When Naipaul paid the second visit to India he found a drastic change in the social and religious life of India. He saw the deep wound in the social and religious life. The civilization of India which is boasted for its deep and profound moral touch and spiritualism was found by Naipaul hollow and empty. So he was very much unhappy to see the grim truth of India particularly the attitudes of the politicians to the general people. He was also very much distressed to see the miserable plight of the marginalised and the haven’t. In other words, he has described every aspects of Indian people, culture and society. Yashoda Bhat rightly observes :



The quest takes another dimension when he visited India in the sixties and seventies and wrote two angry, controversial travelogues—*An Area of Darkness* and *India a Wounded Civilization*. His tirade against India in these books sounded imperialistic and called forth a very unpleasant and furious response from Indians. His homelessness was confirmed and returning to London, he continued to be an expatriate. These books are experimental blending of various literary genre. (Bhatt, 161)

Naipaul develops a very poor opinion about Indian religion and its past glory. He says that the people of India have been fettered in the extreme infatuation for their religion. They have been intellectually parasitic on other civilizations. To him the people of India depended on others for ideas and institution that make a country work. He finds that the emergency which comes so soon after independence dramatises India's creative incapacities, its intellectual depletion, its defencelessness and its inadequacies of every Indian's ideas. He also thinks that the religion of India is creative as well as creeping. The religion of Vinoba Bhave can only express the dust and defeat of the Indian village. Though Indians have made some contributions to science in this century, their work has been done abroad and not in India :

"It is a cause of concern to the Indian scientific community—which feels itself vulnerable in India—that many of those men who are so daring and original abroad should, when they are lured back to India, collapse into ordinariness and yet remain content, become people who seem unaware of their former worth, and seem to have been brilliant by accident. They have been claimed by the lesser civilization, the lesser idea of dharma and self fulfilment. In the civilization reduced to its forms, they no longer have to strive intellectually to gain spiritual merit in their own eyes; that same merit is now to be had by religious right behaviour, correctness." (*India : A Wounded, Civilization* 137)

Between 1988 to 1990 V.S.Naipaul came to India once again and he came with a new travelogue namely *India A Million Mutinies Now*. After the gap of 13 years he realised that he has, to some extent, wrongly, interpreted the great religion, gods and goddesses, culture and conventions, customs and rites of Indian people. He revised his thoughts and visions and presented in a new way in this voluminous book *India : A Million Mutinies Now*. This book is a continuation as well as a revision of his earlier views. It shares some features with his fictional work and some of the new features of novels of



his time. This book is a conglomeration of several approaches. This book contains wide coverage of India as well as his changing attitude towards this country. Yashoda Bhat rightly holds the view :

“It is a revision as well as an introspective deliberation realizing his own earlier inadequacies. The positive factor about this book is his own increased knowledge about India after writing two books. The scenario in India also had changed for it is now post-independence India and Naipaul’s observant eye very perceptibly catches these changes as though with a very sensitive lens. Naipaul’s advantage in this book is that he meets a large number of Indians from various regions representing numerous cross sections of society. He realizes his earlier inadequacies and writes about it.” (Bhatt, 130)

In this book Naipaul says that India is recuperative and least affected by its wound. He is of his strong views that the day is not far when India recovers soon. He feels that the real problem with India is that it is coping with a number of contradictions and paradoxes. Naipaul found decay and darkness in his earlier travelogue but he found a ray of hope in this book. During this gap of 27 years he finds that India has changed abundantly. It has changed from the confusion that accompanied independence to the many voices and perspective of the post colonial. In the 9 chapters of the book Naipaul finds India is coping with a huge discrepancies between the professed ideologies and practiced reality. He also found the Dalit movement raising its head high in the changing scenario. He wrote several lines about B.R.Ambedkar who is supposed to be a great god of the dalits. He thinks that no leaders of comparable authority or esteem had risen among the caste for whom Dr. Ambedkar spoke. He had remained their leader and he was almost their deities. Naipaul rightly observes:

“Men honoured only money now. The great investment in development over three or four decades had led only to this: to corruption, to the criminalisation of politics. In seeking to rise India had undone itself....Policemen, chief politician; the roles had become interchangeable. And with money many long buried particularities had been released. These disruptive, lesser loyalties of region, caste and clan now played on the surface of Indian life.” (A Million Mutinies Now, 37)

It is interesting to note that Naipaul has shown the great obsession of the people of India for their past glory. He says that the people of India mostly live in their past. They



do not want to confront with the miserable situation and drab realities of the present. The views are very much conservative. They never want to change with the changing world of modern time. Extreme infatuation for culture and religion has become the part and parcel of their life. This has become their sickness which resist Indians to move forward towards global programs and development. In other words, the cultural and religious values are more than their life. They live and die for their culture and glorious past. Naipaul finds that the culture and the religion of the Hindus are the inseparable organism of their life. Without culture and religion the Indians would be nothing.

Naipaul's other famous work *A Mimic Men* combines both autobiography and politics. It presents the realistic picture of the predicament of decolonised country of developing and independent existence. It consists of three parts (a) Life in London (b) Childhood and student days and (c) Back to London life. These various discourses make the novel a complex unit. The autobiographical portion shows the writer's early days in England, his meeting with Sandra Marriage. His adventures with politics encouraged by his friend Browne is new opening. Naipaul's attitude to the politics of the post-colonial third world is cynical. The impoverished and barren de-colonised men are called the mimic men and now it has become a proverbial phrase.

His other novel, *A Flag on the Island* was published in 1968. It is comparatively a minor work in which Naipaul brings together several pieces of fiction at different times. This book portrays :

...the cultural confusion arising out of a mixing of various hybrid groups. The cultural mimicry arising out of such an encounter between two unequal cultures is effectively narrated. Naipaul, the novelist, is steeped in historicism, like other Third world writers. History works out pressure on the consciousness of the writer. History is not a series of the few privileged moments and a long series of achievements of the imperial reforms. The writer of the post colonial world shows past history as receding and new history dawning on the horizon. It is the working out of a new History which the writer of the New World projects. Naipaul's novels of Trinidad are an illustration of this principle.

Naipaul's famous novel *A Bend in the River* is based on the theme of African subcontinent. The title of the novel refers to the town situated on the bend in a river in Africa. Salim is the protagonist in the novel. He travels a long way to the continent



accompanied by Metty, a son of one of the family slave. Later on we see this protagonist becomes a trader in the town on the bend of the river. It is a town built by the Europeans. The Europeans had come there in search of gold and silver and had left status built in their honour. The central theme of Naipaul's life that is homelessness is also there in this novel. The homeless expatriates travels frequently. The world outside is changing at the same time the individual is also seen in constant movement.

A House for Mr. Biswas contains a multilayer complex. It is a blending of autobiography, social history and documentary. He deals with a saga of the East Indian Hindu community in the West Indies and his doctrine of historicism which gives him a precise and accurate vision of the rise of a tiny individual against the backdrop of historical forces. In the 'Foreword' of the novel, Naipaul says that of all his books this was the closest to me. This novel shows the story of a man's search for his house. A House for Mr. Biswas emerged out of the creative effusion and delight and became a classic. This novel also contains the autobiographical element that is his father's life, his own life and the world of the emigrant hindus. Yashoda Bhat rightly observes :

The early life of Biswas, and the description of the life of his parents is modelled on the life of Naipaul's parents. The experience of Biswas in the Tulse house old is also modelled upon his own life in a joint family, which had left a deep impact upon him. Biswas's mental breakdown in the middle of the novel has a factual basis in his father's nervous breakdown and a bout of his own depression at Oxford. Naipaul's father was a journalist and Biswas's work with The Guardian as a journalist, is a reproduction of his father's experience. Naipaul's observations of the women in his joint family get transformed into the women characters in the novel. (Bhatt, Yashoda, 120)

A House for Mr. Biswas features several essential elements, one of which is a collision of cultures. In this book, the "Tulsi House" is constantly put in situations where it must communicate and make contact with members of other cultural groups. Pundit Tulsi is credited with bringing ancient Hindu culture to Trinidad; his family has become a symbol of that tradition. On the other hand, Mr. Tulsi views herself as the guardian of this tradition. She does daily puja in addition to other rites. The ancient norms and beliefs are observed to be disappearing as a result of interaction with the foreign culture of the West.



The education of Mr. Tulsi's two boys is entrusted to Roman Catholic organisations. As a direct result of this, they begin to wear crucifixes, and Shekhar even gets married to a Christian woman. In a same fashion, Owadh travels to England in order to further his education in surgery. This demonstrates a blatant violation of the guidelines established by the Hindu religion. Some of the in-laws choose to live apart from one another in their own homes. In other words, the joint family that lived in Tulsi home began to disintegrate as a result of the cultural frictions and influences that existed there. Raghawacharyulu writes:

“In a wider third world context, Naipauls’ attitude to the situation of individuals in a post colonial societies represents a meticulously substantiated analysis of human failure in different from-in the pursuit of careers, in the establishment of societies, in the exercise of political power and in the pursuit of human values. For the post colonial world represents a shift from one colonialism to another. The newborn freedom results in no recovery of confidence, no possibility of healthy self-differentiation it rather becomes a liability and a deterrent to the creative formation of personality.” (D.V.K, Raghawacharyulu, 60)

Naipaul’s other famous work *A Mimic Men* combines both autobiography and politics. It presents a realistic picture of the predicament of decolonised country of developing and independent existence. It consists of three parts (a) Life in London (b) Childhood and student days and (c) Back to London life. These various discourses make the novel a complex unit. The autobiographical portion shows the writer’s early days in England, his meeting with Sandra Marriage. His adventures with politics encouraged by his friend Browne is new opening. Naipaul’s attitude to the politics of the post-colonial third world is cynical. The impoverished and barren de-colonised men are called the mimic men and now it has become a proverbial phrase.

Thus Naipaul is an intuitive writer. He believes in his innermost self. He thinks that there is a great difference between the writer’s personal life and the description he presents in his books. Though he travelled many places in many countries and saw many people but he often believes in his own meditation and contemplation. He is often seen confronting with memories and experiences. In other words he is often motivated by his inner voice. His books are the journey of his self discoveries. His vision is very wide and pervasive. He always remains a detached observer and puts forth his analysis



in an impartial manner. He takes Europe as the model of modernity and development and examines other nations in the Third World. He puts more serious contemplation of India in his three travelogues. His trilogies on India is his endless quest for his identity and belongingness. It also shows his atheistic taste and temperament about the Indian culture, people and religion.

Works Cited

1. Singh, R.A. *A House for Mr. Biswas: A Critical Study*. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot. 2005. Print.
2. Naipaul, V.S. *An Area of Darkness*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1969.
3. Jha, Ravi Kumar. *India: A Wounded Civilization: A Study*. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot. Preface Print.
4. Bhat, Yashoda : V.S.Naipaul : *An Introduction*. Delhi: B.R.Publishers, 1999. Print.
5. Naipaul, V.S. *India : A Wounded Civilization*. London: Penguin, 1978.