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# V. S Naipaul's An Area of Darkness from a postcolonial perspective

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## Abstract

The research paper is an attempt to study V.S Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* through irony for which the author is well known. It aims to explore and describe India and its social, political and religious situations after independence. Naipaul, as a colonial, sees India and colonies through a satirical view, he thinks that Indian people suffer from many social dilemmas which lead them to try to imitate the western civilizations.

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Humiliation, poverty, colonialism in third world states are main themes in this work. *An Area of Darkness* – a travelogue book- comes as a perception of India during its postcolonial era.

The research paper touches on description of India as darkness, Naipaul's identity and his negative view on Islam and Gandhi as a symbol of civilization.



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## INTRODUCTION

Few non-western twentieth-century writers of English have gained a readership as extensive and various as V.S Naipaul. Few have been as prolific in both the genres of fiction and non-fiction and managed to develop and sustain such a singular expressive and literary idioms. At the present time, perhaps the most evident of the several features that distinguish these idioms is its longevity. Readers continue to be surprised at recognizing the same personae, voices, and narrative stances, introduced nearly forty years ago, surfacing with the same nervous energy, in each newly published work. This longevity, however, does not reside in the persistence of Naipaul's narrative tactics alone; instead, it is their combination with the consistency of what Naipaul writes about, primarily third-world subjects, that gives a particular resilience to his expressions. For those readers unfamiliar with the places and situations Naipaul's work has explored, his career takes on an aura of a mission whose goal has been to find away to make one part of the world readable to another. Conversely, for those readers who are familiar with the third-world issues Naipaul has continued to address, his habits of representation appear to be increasingly made up of misperception and inappropriate inquiries. The related themes of homelessness, alienation and dislocation are characteristic of Naipaul's novels.

Naipaul is an author, whose works are often subject matters of many disputes among the critics of contemporary literary scene. This controversial writer has divided the critics into two opposing parties. Some praise him as one of the most gifted authors of these days; the others blame him for "racial arrogance"<sup>1</sup>. He is known as an author, who is either loved and admired or repudiated. After all, there is one thing that most of the critics agree on and it is the fact that Naipaul is the master of observation and depiction and always provides his reader with very sophisticated descriptions. He belongs to the authors whose works are primarily focused on the post-colonial countries, their present situation and the impact of colonialism on identity of individuals. Both his fiction and non-fiction usually deal with the individuals trying to preserve their wholeness in terms of individuality while they are "functioning as cogs in the wheels of a social structure"<sup>3</sup>. His Indian origins, Trinidadian birth and British citizenship allow him to see India and Indian people from a considerably different perspective. He is an "insider" as well as "outsider" to India (Rai). Through his Indian ancestry he can see the country from a very intimate point of view, this kind of double



perspective makes it more difficult for Naipaul to understand his own feelings and reactions in some of the situations that he has to face in India, especially when he realizes his own strangeness. Sometimes he seems surprised by the revelation of his virtues or demerits that he was not aware of. For Naipaul, the cognition of India is simultaneously the discovery of himself. His Trinidadian childhood, Indian origin and the residency in London make his position in the world highly indeterminate. He fully identifies with neither of these countries. He rather sees himself as a blend of the three cultures. He feels absolutely alienated and unable to identify with any of these societies. The central idea of his books is “the struggle against the effects of displacement”<sup>2</sup>.. His literature presents the image of an author who did not receive any sense of belonging anywhere but the wide range of experience of this author has resulted in many memorable books. His literary works present the image of a person who is constantly in search of a cultural mooring. Although he has a vast repertoire of literary output at his disposal, he is not only a natural writer but a natural novelist.....His vision is his own, unaffected by contemporary social cliché or political routine. He is independent but also relevant. He is engaged with the stresses and strains that we recognize crucial in our experience now. His writing is the mixture in him of creeds, cultures and continents, with his expatriate career, his being able to practice an art in and of totally dissimilar worlds, all gives him peculiar contemporary quality.

The natives who are devoid of their own culture, customs and traditions, religion, and race consider themselves to be inferior to those of their master and try to identify themselves with the empire. As they are far away from their original homeland, their own original traditions and religions have become meaningless to them and being completely different from the master in cultural, traditional, racial, and religious backgrounds, they can never successfully associate themselves with the colonizer either. They suffer from dislocation, placelessness, fragmentation, and loss of identity. As these psychological problems remain unsolved even after independence is achieved, independence itself becomes a word but not a real experience. Without the colonizer, the colonized see themselves as lost in their postcolonial society that fails to offer a sense of national unity and identity.

Literary works of Naipaul reveals a dislike for Islamic conquerors on India who for many centuries cruelly and brutally killed those who opposed them. All Naipaul's books concisely expresses several themes and shows why he has one of the most analytical perspectives on the postcolonial world , his ironic view on India is his own personal way to



show his desire's feelings of order, freedom and achievement in order to understand ourselves. (Rohler) chooses to point out that:

the position of ironist in colonial society is indeed a delicate one. the early Naipaul is at times the irresponsible ironist....satire is the sensitive measures of a society's departure from the norm inherent in itself ....this explains the mixture of farce and social consciousness which occurs on the two early novels.<sup>4</sup>

Naipaul's engagement with the social and cultural friction caused by ethnic traditions forced into proximity, and the rituals in the face of economic modernities, repetitively leads him to conclusions about the cultural and political poverty that seems to characterize and increasingly destitute greater "Third World". well-known affinity with an English tradition, therefore, is not a betrayal of his origins, but a discovery of one possibility, or even one aspect, of the inevitability of Caribbean and postcolonial literature. Naipaul's belief that culture meets the requirements of authenticity only when a continuum with its original source is maintained through practice and its accompanying tradition not only underscores the rest of Naipaul's assessment of the communities of the Caribbean, but also reveals the framework of his aesthetic investment, for Naipaul, questions of cultural authenticity are absolutely integral to questions of nationalist possibilities. Naipaul's work has been deployed to cover a broad range of concerns.

Homi bhabha's work on the colonial subject, for example, utilizes Naipaul's work as the exemplary texts upon which his theoretical investigations are realized, he reads Naipaul's representations by exercising the methods and analyses of deconstructive practice and psychoanalytic theory to trace Naipaul's replication of the constructions of difference that constitute focal points of repression in colonialist representations.

V. S Naipaul's *An area of darkness* – A discovery of India is the first of his acclaimed Indian trilogy. It is an emotional travelogue written during his first visit to India in 1964. It is logically the most emotional and subjective book. It describes his first journey to the country of his ancestors, which was evidently a very emotive experience for the author, and therefore, the writer could not remain unmoved. *An Area of Darkness* is not a mere objective description typical of travel books, but it shows the reader a picture of India seen through the eyes of one of the most excellent observers, who has a very intimate relationship



with the country through his ancestors. Naipaul does not hesitate to reveal his true feelings about India and gives the reader very melancholic and ironical depictions of what he observes. The only people who will say good things about him are Western people, right-wing people, Because of his ironic view on India and its societies.



## 1\_ AN AREA OF DARKNESS 1964

Home is, I suppose, just a child's idea, A house at night, and a lamp in the house. A place to feel safe

V. S. Naipaul

An Area of Darkness functions not only as a title, but as a metaphor for the idealized India of Naipaul's ancestors. Darkness is a resonant and complex metaphor that runs all throughout Naipaul's writing. In some cases it stands for the obvious; the unknown or the unknowable. In others it stands for the outside world beyond the safety zone of familiarity and community. In others still it may stand for the past; both personal and collective. The reader of this incredible and at times maddening book follows Naipaul's episodic excursions through various parts of the sub-continent. Through his journey Naipaul is hoping to discover that the ambiguous idea of the India he grew up with in Trinidad would correspond to the actual India he physically encounters in his travels. But such a correspondence cannot occur because, as Naipaul comes to realize, the reality of something can never live up to the idea. Although traces of its customs and traditions were evident in Trinidad, Naipaul states that India was never real for him in any significant way beyond that of a place from which his ancestors had come. India, in this sense, was never home for Naipaul, just as Trinidad had never been "home" for him: "And India had in a special way been the background of my childhood. It was the country from which my grandfather came, a country never physically described and therefore never real, a country out in the void beyond the dot of Trinidad; and from it our journey had been final. It was a country suspended in time. Naipaul's project in An Area of Darkness is to return to India in order to reclaim the real India for himself. However, when Naipaul arrives in India he simultaneously feels a part of the crowd (in that he now resembles others in skin colour) and apart from the crowd (in that he cannot connect with the mentality of the physical India).

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.

These are the words V. S. Naipaul writes in the final of An Area of Darkness, the most



lyrical, sad and melancholic book of the whole trilogy. It was the first time that Naipaul had a chance to see the country his grandfather left at the end of the nineteenth century. From the very beginning it is noticeable that Naipaul is enormously disenchanted with the reality that he has to face during his first sojourn in the country of his ancestors. He “attacks the culture and morality of India both collectively and individually”<sup>5</sup>. It is for him a powerful emotional experience, which not only changed his whole life but, above all, it also strongly influenced his further writing.

In 1947, after a long period of English supremacy, India gained its independence, but had not managed to enjoy its “triumph” as the new obstruction appeared: the “internal discord of the country caused by the conflicts between the Hindus and the Muslims led to the division of India and the new country of Pakistan was created”<sup>6</sup>. The independent India proved enormously incompetent in terms of governing its own nation and of economic development.

Naipaul comes to India, which is adrift by its social and political crises. The economic situation is shattering due to a high extent of corruption and ineffective governance. His reactions to the country of his origins were shock and despair. The picture of India, which he describes during his first visit, was too severe and cruel for him to be able to maintain an objective eye. Instead, he let all his emotions burst out of him. He could not stand to look at all the squatting people in the dusty streets, ragged, scruffy beggars, and pervasive dirt in the ruins of the long-ago burnt-out glory.

Even larger desperateness grows in Naipaul with the sad realization that the real India and the India of his childhood are completely different places. His memories of the practices of Indian customs and traditions, which he experienced in the Hindu community in Trinidad, differ considerably from what he experiences later in India. That is also one of the principal reasons for his depression and melancholy that he feels in the Indian environment. The real India fails to fulfil the vision of India of his imagination.

Naipaul often compares India and Trinidad in terms of their colonial past. Both countries are bound by the same fate as former British colonies. England has a very important role within the book, not only as a place of Naipaul’s contemporary residence, but mainly as a former colonial ruler over India and Trinidad. Naipaul examines the Indian colonial past and



its influence on contemporary Indian situation. He sees the colonial experience of India as the source of all the inadequacies that are described in the book

He also evaluates the Hindu principles that shape the core of the Indian society and affects the overall behaviour of Indian people. The most significant and influential Indian spiritual leader Mahatma Gandhi has a very specific role within the whole trilogy. His description and the attitude of Naipaul toward him go through considerable changes. In *An Area of Darkness*, he serves mainly as a representative of the western ideas and visions of the world and stands in contrast to the rest of Indian society.

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The overall mood of the book elucidates in the last chapter, where Naipaul provides the reader with a very personal declaration

India had not worked its magic on me. It remained the land of my childhood, an area of darkness; like the Himalayan passes, it was closing up again, as fast as I withdrew from it, into a land of myth; it seemed to exist in just the timelessness which I had imagined as a child, into which, for all that I walked on Indian earth, I knew I could not penetrate.<sup>7</sup>

## 2\_ summary, themes and cultural context

### a \_ Summary

The story is a semi-autobiographical account given by Naipaul of a year he spent in India in 1964. The opening section entitled *Travellers Prelude* deals with the difficulties surrounding bureaucracy in the country. Naipaul speaks about how he made many difficult efforts to recover alcohol that was confiscated from him.

The book is divided into three parts. Part one is entitled *A Resting Place for the Imagination*. He speaks about his ancestors coming to India as indentured labourers. He also deals with his first experiences on the issue of race, of Muslims and Hindus. Naipaul was born an unbeliever. He grew up in an orthodox Hindu family. In India he explains how caste comes to mean the brutal division of labour and this was an unpleasant concept. While he was an unbeliever he was still saddened at the decay of old customs and rituals. Naipaul talks about



the poverty in India and how it is one of the poorest countries in the world. When he moves to London he find himself as one more face in the midst of Industrialized England.

Naipaul speaks about the Indian English mimicry and how this is just like fantasy. He goes on to speak about the custom of defecating everywhere and how they refuse to acknowledge this fact. The approach to many villages is not a pleasant experience therefore. Naipaul speaks about Mahatma Gandhi and how he was able to look at India squarely and see its problems in a totally objective manner.

Part Two opens with the image of a Doll's House on the Dal Lake. This is in fact a hotel called Hotel Liward, which is situated in Kashmir. He speaks about his relationships with the various people who worked in the hotel and the ensuing conflicts, which occurred. We learn about the function of the Indian Civil Service. He is encouraged to join a pilgrimage to the Cave of Amarnath the Eternal Lord, which is ninety miles north of Srinagar. He, speaks about his joy and that of the other pilgrims as they climb the Himalayas and try to get inside a cave. Even though they are on a pilgrimage Naipaul states how as soon as they got inside the cave it was like a typical Indian bazaar. Naipaul recounts many anecdotes among them one about a young couple called Rafiq and Laraine. Rafiq is a poor musician. They spend a good deal of time fighting but eventually they get married. They split up however as she is unable to bear the poverty in India. She returns home to America.

Part Three is entitled Fantasy and Ruins. This section deals with how the British possessed the country completely. Their withdrawal was irrevocable. He speaks about the English of the raj how they swaggered and had mannerisms and spoke a jargon. He mentions Kipling and how he is a good chronicler of Anglo-India. He talks about how the "Taj Mahal" is a great building without a function. He goes on to speak about writers and how Indian attempts at the novel reveal the Indian confusion further.

Naipaul moves on to speak about Indian railways and how he befriended a Sikh while travelling by train in the south of India.

He comes to the conclusion however that India for him remains an area of darkness. He has learned over the years his separateness his contentment with being a colonial without a



past and without ancestors. At the conclusion of the novel he tells us about his encounter with an emaciated man called Ramachandra. This man wants help to start litigation and get some land, which formerly belonged to Naipaul's grandfather. Naipaul is disgusted at this incident and leaves in a mood of self-reproach. He talks about his flight home and how it was made up of anxiety and frustration. He admits that the journey to India should not have been made as it broke his life in two.

## b \_ Themes

### b -1 : "Third world "

Third world theme has been an obsessive topic in most V.S Naipaul's works, but it is never the natural theme for him to write about for many critics. Naipaul writes about what he observed during his journey , India , Pakistan, Malaysia , Indonesia , Ivory coast, Zaire, Iran ,Argentina , Uruguay and so on , were his destinations .describing the societies , peoples and lives in his writings , Naipaul describes the reason why chooses postcolonial societies rather than England as his subject matter for most of his novels and travel books ,determined to become a great and well-known writer , also he knows so little about England even he has spent many years in that country.

An Area of Darkness is a novel that Naipaul describes the India as a darkness area , he thinks that third world countries are such the place where people suffer from humiliation and tyranny , there is no human rights , no equality between men and women . Naipaul's ironic view on India implies to the decay that society suffers from.

### b – 2 : Poverty

The story abounds with descriptions of the extreme poverty of India. Naipaul describes India as 'the poorest country in the world.' The Indians defecate everywhere but fail to face up to this fact according to Naipaul. He analyses in a very logical way the reasons why he thinks Poverty exists in such a real way in India. He mentions at one stage how 'divorce of the intellect from body labour has made of us the most resource less and most exploited nation on earth.' The concluding section abounds in grim and rather depressing images of



poverty. When Naipaul pays a trip to the village and meets the emaciated Ramachandra who is surrounded in dire poverty he is appalled and simply wants to leave the country at once. Poverty is seen as a self-defeating and destructive reality in this country.

The most striking to the eye for Naipaul, before he could penetrate into the psyche of India, was its visual aspect. He sees the country full of dirt, dust, starved and sick people and poor beggars. Indian poverty, commented on throughout the travelogue, is for Naipaul an enormously painful experience. His vivid descriptions of people squatting in the streets and of dirty, decrepit beggars craving for alms create a typical picture of Indian environment.. For Naipaul, “India is the poorest country in the world” (an area of Darkness<sup>44</sup>).

As Naipaul highlights, beggary has its special position in India and cannot be judged from a European perspectives. Beggars have a secure position within the society. It is an inseparable element of India. Beggary has its “function”, because every act of “giving to the beggar” is seen as “the automatic act of charity, which is an automatic reverence to God”.<sup>8</sup>

Defecating belongs to India in the same way as beggary. It became 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.<sup>9</sup>

### b – 3 : Colonialism

One section of the novel is devoted to this theme. He mentions at one stage how the country only pretends to be colonial, ‘yesterday the country’s mimicry was Mogul, tomorrow it could be Russian or American’ (an area of darkness) He concludes by stating that the



Indian English mimicry is like fantasy. When the British withdrew completely from India something of fantasy remained attached to their presence there. He draws a comparison between colonial India and colonial Trinidad. Trinidad is a British colony but in size it is only a dot on the map and therefore it is important to be British. Naipaul states that the England of India was different an incongruous imposition in his words. He goes on to state the negativity of colonialism and how he felt the coming together of India and England as 'a violation, buildings were too grand, too big for the puniness, poverty and defeat in which they were set. He mentions how these buildings strove to impose attitudes on people from both within and without. Overall the impression given in this book of colonialism in India is extremely negative.

## C \_ Cultural Context

Colonial India in the twentieth century forms the cultural context of this novel. Naipaul gives the reader a vivid insight into the various sects and cultural systems dominating this country. In Part two of the novel Naipaul analyses the whole colonial process. There are copious references to Hinduism and Muslims and Buddhism and he paints some vivid pictures of the various customs, which these people engage in.

## 3 \_ Naipaul's perception of India

Naipaul has been in India a much longer time and travelled much more extensively. Yet, the impressions of his first visit as recorded in *An Area of Darkness* are journalistic and lack depth in some areas of observation. Naipaul journeys India, for the first time, with the professed aim of discovering his Indian identity. It has always been significant for a writer to establish a distinct identity, especially when s/he is an outsider or wants to be considered one. This leaves a mark on his writings.

His first visit to India in 1962 was undertaken as a quest for his roots in the country from where his grandfather had migrated to Trinidad as an indentured labourer, at the beginning of this century. He first visited Bombay and found that it was not what he had expected. He hated being part of a crowd at Church gate station and craved for preferential



treatment, something that he had always got-in Trinidad and England. But here in India he found no special attention from Indians. He kept himself seeing the film posters that seemed to divine from a cooler and luscious world, Naipaul writes:

...Cooler and more luscious than the film poster of England and America, promising greater gaiety, and ampler breast and hip, a more fruitful womb.<sup>10</sup>

Naipaul's observation is based on his assessment of the Indian characters as romantic, emotional and exotic, which is typical Western orientalist bravura. His comments on most socio-political events of the day were peripheral. The Chinese attack on India in 1962 shook up the entire country. Naipaul was in India at that time but did not feel concerned about it. Nehru's greatest blunder, ill-equipped war against the Chinese, makes Naipaul angry and turns him bitterly satiric in his chapter on Emergency. He was then in India and saw the hollowness everywhere in the land, a total misfit in a modern world. Naipaul was quite upset on the failure of Mr. Nehru.

Shri Aurobindo had already warned Mr. Nehru regarding Chinese invasion, but Nehru was careless about the land saying that is 'the waste land.' Naipaul heard many rumours. He writes:

...according to bazaar rumour, Chou-En-lai had promised the Chinese people as a Christmas present. The Indian Marwari merchants, it was said, were already making enquiries about business prospect under Chinese rule; the same rumour had it that, in the south the Madrasis, despite their objection to Hindi were already learning Chinese.<sup>11</sup>

But these are peripheral like his comments on the Kashmir. He made no attempt to explore the psyche of a nation jolted out of its post-colonial euphoria, bordering on a sense of invincibility.

Throughout an area of darkness there is a sense of humiliation, of a personal frustration that the India of his secret imagination and longings, of his imagined origins, in another oriental third world country despite its size and ancient history. He is angry at the dirt, decay, incompetence, corruption, passivity, the humiliation by the threatening Chinese army. Like many other nationalists, Naipaul wants a modern, western efficient industrialized state, and he wants a revitalized native, traditional, authentic culture. Naipaul as a person of Indian



ancestry, his comments must be taken seriously as good counsel, but, then, there have been serious criticism of his views as ill-informed.

For many Indian critics, Naipaul denies the optimistic side of India, despite making some strong valid points; Naipaul almost never touches optimistic side .As if he has decided to turn a blind eye towards the positive side of things. As (Bhosale) in his article writes:

Naipaul's description of India is impulsive and anecdotal. His failure is evident in the overall gloomy picture that comes out of his writing. But again this is the beauty of a travelogue, as it captures the true responses of a visitor. The picture surely is not complete and lacks many facades of India. As an Indian, I feel really sad, as most of Naipaul's analysis and criticism holds so true that I cannot deny it. What he saw in 1964 has seldom changed after almost fifty years. His sharp criticism of almost everything related to India offends and hurts me. But at the same time, it helps me to pause and look at myself and my country from a different perspective. I may not recommend this book to an outsider, as it does not capture the true essence of India. But Indians should definitely give it a read, as it might act as a catalyst in the process of change that we all desire as Indians.<sup>12</sup>



## 4\_Naipaul's identity and a colonialist

### a - Naipaul's identity

in a year I had not learned acceptance. I had learned my separateness from India, and was content to be a colonial, without a past, without ancestors.<sup>13</sup>

Naipaul's identity plays a crucial role in the trilogy. His ambiguity in terms of national feeling and belonging to a particular country is a core predisposition for his perception of India. Although he grew up in a Hindu community in Trinidad, he remained detached from the country of his grandfather. The long distance induced the main differences between the Indians in Trinidad and the Indians in India. Through almost a hundred years in emigration the gap between those in Trinidad and those in India widened and finally two distinctive cultures aroused of this separateness.

The real India is completely different from what the author dreamt of as being his homeland. The shock that he has to overcome, when he realizes that the real India has nothing in common with the India of his imagination, is crucial for the overall mood of this book. His family ancestors, who moved to Trinidad, cherished their memories and traditions and it became the source of his ideal thoughts of his mother country.

The India, then, which was the background to my childhood was an area of the imagination. It was not the real country I presently began to read about and whose map I committed to memory.<sup>14</sup>

He realizes that his image of India is not adequate and feels ascertain separateness and distance from the country. An Area of Darkness is not only about the failure of India, but also about the failure of the myth of Naipaul's childhood. Naipaul's identity is strongly connected to his imaginary world. With the loss of his ideals the loss of identity comes immediately. The author feels alienated, not knowing who he really is. He fails to identify with Indians



“In India I had so far felt myself a visitor. Its size, its temperatures, its crowds: I had prepared myself for these, but in its very extremes the country was alien”.<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, Naipaul has very contradictory feelings about his homeland. He feels a very strong bond to this country. His confusion may easily be traced in this book. On one hand, he is distressed of his rootlessness; he does not feel to be an Indian. On the other hand, he is frustrated when he is denied his dissimilarity:

Now in Bombay I entered a shop or a restaurant and awaited a special quality of response. And there was nothing. It was like being denied part of my reality. [...] 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.<sup>16</sup>

The feeling of separateness and disillusion leads Naipaul nearly to a complete negation of India, as it is suggested at the end of the travelogue.

It was only now, as my experience of India defined 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.<sup>17</sup>

## b – Naipaul as a colonial

Racial Compartmentalization of the Caribbean required by the logic of both slavery and colonization, causes earlier West Indian writers to tend to write basically about their communities, and the outsiders only as caricatures or figures of fun. Naipaul admits that his contacts with members of other races were minimal and that he met people who were outside his ethnic group only in official contexts where necessity dictated so, from many Naipaul's essays, the readers can notice that his writings appear to have been minimum contacts with people of other races. Familiarity with other groups is only at a distance. Among the immigrant Indians were some of Islamic background. At the age of eighteen Naipaul won a scholarship to University College, Oxford, to study English. In a characteristic acerbic style he described his period there as a complete waste of time, spent reading texts that did not contribute anything to his desire to become a writer, an ambition that was assiduously encouraged by his father.



Earning a scholarship was for Naipaul an escape route from the constraining limitations of an island life. Apart from the father's improvidence, unhelpful relatives, the constant anxiety of living in unstable homes, and ultimately the consciousness of having a talent were to provide the backdrop to Naipaul's neurosis about what he described as half-made societies.

## 5\_Religion and social structure

Naipaul defined his own native Trinidad as an "area of darkness" and set out to deal with the problematic of darkness through travel. "Areas of darkness" can be described as spaces in which one is conscious of the gradual loss of one's ancestral culture, with the accompanying sense of dislocation and personal and social degradation that follows from this loss. In religious terms, they can be described as spaces of exile or alienation. Conscious of the impact of the loss of the traditional Hindu worldview on his personal identity, Naipaul develops the ability to detect religious charlatans in his quest to overcome the darkness. Naipaul's work made an important contribution to understanding the religious charlatan in the evolution of colonial societies. Since religion lies at the base of colonial social formation, the religious charlatan either keeps the society as a dependent periphery or makes it an active participant in reforming the world.

The substance of the Indian character lies in the deeply rooted Hindu tradition and the caste system, which determines the social structure in India. Hinduism is the major Indian religion apart from Buddhism and Islam. The Hindu-Muslim conflict is many times evoked in the trilogy. The clashes and the mutual misunderstanding between the devotees of the two religious groups are usually shown on the way people are living. Naipaul writes about the Muslim ghettos placed out of the rest of the Hindu society. In the encounter of Naipaul, as a representative of Hindu, with Azis, a representative of Muslim, we can trace a considerable misunderstanding between those two religions. Naipaul himself confesses that despite the fact that his relationship to Azis was more or less warm and on friendly terms, there occurred some moments of misapprehension. Naipaul realizes that Muslims "were somewhat more



different than others”, because “they were not to be trusted; they would always do you down”.<sup>18</sup>

Yet the author does not focus on these relations that much as he focuses on Hinduism itself. It stands at the background to every aspect of life portrayed in his books. Naipaul himself has a very ambiguous position in terms of religious affiliation. Though he clearly states that he is not a believer that he remained almost totally ignorant of Hinduism and that his Hindu upbringing evoked only that sense of the difference of people, [...], a vaguer sense of caste, and a horror of the unclean, there was evidently “Hindu-traditional, Brahmin side of him”.<sup>19</sup> It appears in the way he is accepting the people practising their rituals, in the way he is sympathizing with the Brahmin family and their eating habits and in his ability to “separate the pleasant from the unpleasant”.<sup>20</sup>

Hindu people tend to escape to their inner world instead of facing the reality. In case of any conflict, they are known for their inactivity. The outer world does not really matter. They live in purity, frugality and non-violence. Poverty is regarded as the part of the Hindu lifestyle. It goes hand in hand with Hinduism, because Hindus are not focused on materialistic aspects of life. It is almost romanticised into something worth adulation.

The individual spiritual elevation is superior to the prosperity of the whole nation. The only unit that matters in terms of Hindu lifestyle is caste, clan and family. This deeply established social structure is the base of the Indian social hierarchy. Everyone is predetermined by birth to play a certain role in his life. There is no tolerance of social mobility within caste system. Caste is what primarily defines each person within the society.

Class is a system of rewards. Caste imprisons a man in his function. From this it follows, since there are no rewards, those duties and responsibilities become irrelevant to position. A man is his proclaimed function. There is little subtlety to India. The poor are thin; the rich are fat.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, Naipaul does not deplore the caste system as such. He believes that it had a very important role in shaping the nation in the past and it worked well. Yet, he sees the failure of this system as it prevailed into present. The modern society cannot be based on such principles as is caste system and he regards this lasting, deep-rooted social structure as



the obstacle on the way to India's transformation and development. He asserts that "in the beginning" caste system was "useful division of labour in a rural society", but "it has now divorced function from social obligation, position from duties. It is inefficient and destructive; it has created a psychology which will frustrate all improving plans"<sup>22</sup>

## a – Naipaul's view on Islam

V.S Naipaul has a negative point of view on Islam and its rules, during his encounters in the non-Arab Islamic world, visiting the four non-Arab Muslim countries in 1980 (Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia), and his aim was to "see Islam in action" and "to find out about the application of Islam to institutions, to government, to law". he states in his essay "our Universal Civilization" that the secular and the sacred are pitted against one another, with the "fundamentalist" Islamic world appearing as the intransigence that resist modernity because it resists the secular. Naipaul goes on to attribute the historical causes for this "Philosophical hysteria" to the double colonization enacted on the non-Arab Islamic world: that of the Arab faith and that of a mercantile Europe, being "doubly colonized" such people are "doubly removed from themselves" The Islamic faith, furthermore, "abolished the past" because "to possess the faith was to possess the only truth"<sup>23</sup>

His isolation of the Islamic world to an array of politicized agendas of dictatorial leaders mobilizing disenfranchised populaces, and his reduction of Islamic monotheism to a fixed category ignores the lessons of the historical processes-including colonialism- that allowed for a secularization of Christianity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Consequently, his reification of the Enlightenment's near-deification of rationality – a philosophical formulation essential to the secularization of Faith – itself abolishes the recent past and its economic divisions of the world that would help explain why the current posture of "our universal civilization" may have engendered a counter hegemonic stance.

In this statement Naipaul presents the western civilization as universal, always in creative process and the Muslims bound to take help from them though they do not like their ideology. Naipaul is so preoccupied by this prejudice that he cannot understand the simple fact that the countries such as Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia have got independence from



the western countries only some decades ago and consequently they as the developing countries seem to be interested in the western scientific developments. But ideologically they do not like the West because they were the victims of rampant exploitation and oppression during the colonial rule. To be more precise, it is very natural for the third world countries to swing between dependence on and rejection of the western civilization

According to Naipaul, Islam is a backward religion and it can give birth to terrorism and religious fanaticism. The Muslim is averse to progress and bears a miserable existence and is unable to compete with the rest of the world. This notion about Islam and Muslim aggravates the misconceptions regarding Islam in the West and contributes to deepening the chasm between the two civilizations.

Most of Islamic critics condemn Naipaul's thoughts about Islam saying that it is a matter of regret that a man like Naipaul with a huge intelligence and gifts has written such things, full of story after story illustrating the same thing again and again; and consequently the theme is rudimentary, primitive, unsatisfactory and concocted. He never minds history, philosophy, politics and geography. This careless mentality begets a limitation of vision in his mind. His Islamophobia aggravates this limitation of vision. As a result, he becomes prejudiced against Islam, and this prejudice augments his misconceptions about Islam.

## 6 \_ Gandhism

Naipaul comes to analyse persons and personalities from religion and religious philosophies. His study of Gandhism also is very much important, his shifting of positions as “insider” “outsider” shows clearly that he has got different attitudes. In an Area of Darkness, he says, “India undid him, he became a Mahatma Gandhi.” He shows us two different Gandhis in his work, one is the radical South African Gandhi and the other one who became Mahatma in India.

Naipaul devotes his deepest interest to Mahatma Gandhi, the most significant and reputable Indian spiritual leader and famous representative of Hinduism. Gandhi has a very specific role in An Area of Darkness, because of his western experience. The author uses Gandhi to show the contrast of western vision of India and the Indian perception of reality.



Like Naipaul, Gandhi acquired a capability to see India with a western eye through his long residence abroad. The whole Indian society is centred on Gandhi

the observer, the failed reformer, is of course Mohandas Gandhi. Mahatma, great-souled, father of the nation, deified, his name is given to streets and parks and squares, honoured everywhere by statues and mandaps[...], he is nevertheless the least Indian of Indian leaders.<sup>24</sup>

In *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul's description of Gandhi is mostly positive. He sees him as the greatest Indian reformer, who, having gained a western experience, could objectively perceive the reality in India and who felt a strong need for a change. The first thing Gandhi noticed is the filth all around India. He was not blind to the poverty and dirt like other Indian people. He asserts that Instead of having graceful hamlets dotting the land, we have dung-heaps.

By our bad habits we spoil our sacred river banks and furnish excellent breeding grounds for flies. [...] Leaving night-soil, cleaning the nose, or spitting on the road is a sin against God as well as humanity, and betrays a sad want of consideration for others. The man who does not cover his waste deserves a heavy penalty even if he lives in a forest.<sup>25</sup>

Gandhi's position in India is unique at least at the same level as is Naipaul's. As a young man Gandhi went to England to study at University and before he finally came back and settled in India, he spent twenty years in South Africa. His African experience is regarded as crucial in moulding Gandhi's identity in positive fashion. Therefore, he looked at India as no Indian was able to; his vision was direct, and this directness, was, and is, revolutionary. He was able to see Indian inadequacies and also felt the need to reform India to be able to endure in modern world, because he never lost the critical comparing South African eye. Gandhi supported many ideas that are typical of European countries and Naipaul praises him for this attitude, describing him as if he was not an Indian but "a colonial blend of East and West"

[Gandhi] 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 decayed society.<sup>26</sup>



## 7\_ Mimicry

In *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul often uses words like *mimic* and *mimicry* to suggest imitation or copying of American or European civilization. This appears similar to the usual nationalist complaint that the elite and bourgeoisie have cut themselves off from local or national traditions supposedly still practised by the people or folk. Naipaul regards sentimentalizing of the past as reactionary, self-defeating, and contrary to the need for modernization; yet the modernization he wants must be different from aping of the west. He wants a will to change, an idea of the self, a purpose, an existential being which is authentic in evolving from past and the culture. Although his novel, *The Mimic Men*, is concerned with West Indian mimicry of the British it will question whether the ideal he seeks is possible and whether the solution he seeks for his feelings of alienation is in writing rather than being part of a larger, grander civilization.

The postulate of Bhabha's critique is that "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite". Naipaul states in his novel *The Mimic Men*,

"We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new"<sup>27</sup>.

Mimicry and repetition are the two narrative forms that Naipaul locks the colonial and postcolonial characters he creates and their respective situation into.



## Conclusion

Writing is Naipaul's religion. It is the only thing he has done throughout his life. As his muse, it drives him and he is totally possessed by it since it is his way of being human in the world. To read Naipaul's works is synonymous with reading his personal religious or philosophical worldview. Naipaul empowers himself through his writing. Like his father before him, he is seeking his own home in the world; he constructs a home for himself through his creative writing. He constructs his own subjectivity via the powerful writing. Through the "geographical imagination" of his writing, Naipaul creates a home for himself. He makes an effort to resist the sense of insecurity and of uncertainty. Naipaul, as an exiled writer, is Caught in-between: writing between home and homelessness, he takes advantage of being an exile to create his own space, his own home, one which is simultaneously nowhere and everywhere.

The query that can always be reiterated is the one that looks into the relationship that has developed between Naipaul as writer and Naipaulian world view. Whether one is discomforted or illuminated by Naipaul's investigations into the failure of modernity, the fact persists that his language, his style, his attention to form, and his expressive dimension have maintained a brilliance and mastery that have become landmarks in contemporary writing in English. Naipaul embodies one of the possible paradox of postcolonial literature namely, the disjunction between the materiality of language and the materiality of history.

Naipaul in *An Area of Darkness* cannot cope with the reality that he has to face being for the first time in the land of his forefathers. The real India fails to fulfil Naipaul's expectations. He is absolutely disgusted by the appalling conditions in India. It is the country of dirt and dust.

Naipaul's books are seen by critics as some of the finest expressions of the dilemmas and struggles of colonized people striving to make both their individual and social lives meaningful in a postcolonial context. And they interpret Naipaul's writings as prejudiced against the third world.

We believe that V.S. Naipaul is surely a great writer and any of his words should



not be misinterpreted, as he himself said that “I don’t mean this in any unkind way.”<sup>28</sup> Let’s leave the controversies aside as many bloggers and commentators have already had even the last drops of the topic and there is almost nothing left! He is, without any doubt, an amazing and beloved writer and such minor things do not have the potential to mar his reputation.



## Endnotes

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