

## Naipaul's Vision of Indian Diaspora

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Twentieth century life and literature from 1960 onwards has been characterized by Diaspora. Diaspora plays a very important role in V.S. Naipaul's career as a writer. A major portion of his life can be constructed from Naipaul's numerous books which belong to various literary genres; sometimes they even blend and become a mingled medley of desperate strains. V.S. Naipaul's unique position as twice removed diasporic writer and his three books spanning three decades of his engagement with India provide him this unprecedented opportunity.

Naipaul has great connection with India that is amply revealed in his writings. He has written extensively on India. The trinity of his travel writing is: *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977) and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1991). These travel writings have established Naipaul as a critic of India and an anti-Indian expatriate. He criticises Indian customs, insignificant religious practices, hypocritical notions and meaningless spiritual ideas. Naipaul possessed a romantic view of India in his consciousness. The India of his childhood, of Hindu culture, of beautiful temples and colourful festivals helped him build up a dream homeland. He was aware of his ancestral roots. He once remarked: "The particular diaspora where my work begins, if I can use this word for the migration of my ancestors which took place just over a hundred years ago." (*The Times of India*, June 21, 1994).

In *Area of Darkness*, Naipaul describes his visit to village of his grandfather in Uttar Pradesh. His grandfather was a poor Brahmin. With the help of an 'arakatia', a recruiter, he went to Trinidad and worked in a Sugar factory; in addition to his profession he also worked as a Banaras-trained Pandit. Gradually he prospered and accumulated a huge property.

V.S. Naipaul had a romantic dream of his homeland. He allows India to appear on the canvas of his memory and imagination. But he was separated from India by two generations. Nonetheless, India had been the background of his childhood.

These books which constitute his travel writings refer to an independent genre. The trinity of Indian travels receive aggressive notes from Indian scholars and critics for his anti-Indian projection. In this context, Naipaul remarks: "I am profoundly Indian in my feeling, profoundly in my sensibility — but not in my observations." The problem of V.S. Naipaul is that he remains as Indian in feeling and sensibility but tries to judge his homeland on western

modes of life. His travelogues have a theme for quest, for roots. His response is like an Indian at the same time he views India as an outsider. *An Area of Darkness* (1964) follows the model of his first travel writing *The Middle Passage*. In 1960s his visit to India was based on romantic stories told by his relatives in the West Indies. On his visit to India, Naipaul suffered from cultural shock when he encountered degrading and depressing human conditions. The beginning of the novel posits a very disheartening picture of the Custom houses and Bombay docks. He felt aghast with uncivilized red tapeism of Indian bureaucracy in early sixties. His two bottles of whisky that he bought from Alexandria was immediately seized because he had no transport permit. To Custom authorities he put a query: "But what is transport permit? ... Help me. Where can I get this transport permit?"<sup>1</sup> The reply was disparaging and humiliating. V.S. Naipaul felt frustrated. Bombay docks had been his Gateway to India. The most noticeable feature of *An Area of Darkness* (1964) is its narrative that exposes the filth, degraded people, decaying social condition and apparent stupidity of Indian living in different cities. His portrayal of Goa and Goanese present a very unpleasant picture. *An Area of Darkness* (1964) stands today as a first stage of diasporic writer's problematic relation with country of his origin: it abounds in confusions and contradictions.

*India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977), V. S. Naipaul's second book on India, marks the second stage in the development of his diasporic concerns. As compared to *An Area of Darkness* (1964) this book is analytical in tone. The chaotic alteration between acceptance and rejection of India in the earlier book is replaced by an ordered and organized search through history, sociology, politics and literature. However, it is similar to *An Area of Darkness* (1964) in its point of beginning. This book too begins with the author and his mental make-up. That is how the perspective is defined as a diasporic one:

India is for me a difficult country. It isn't my home and can't be my home; and yet I can't reject it or be indifferent to it; I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far... A hundred years had been enough to wash me clear of many Indian religious attitudes; and without these attitudes the distress of India was – and is – almost insupportable. It has taken me much time ... to define what separates me from the country; and to understand how far the 'Indian' attitudes of someone like myself ... have diverged from the attitudes of people to whom India is still whole.<sup>2</sup>

*India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977) refers to V.S. Naipaul's agony and his vision of his homeland that is based on paradoxes, lassitude and feelings of shame. The extreme poverty and illiteracy compelled thousands of Indian peasants and farmers to emigrate to Africa, Trinidad, West Indies and Guatemala where they worked as labours. The title of the book is satirical. V.S. Naipaul criticises the imposition of Emergency after independence showed India's incapacity and intellectual depletion. The entire book narrates India's political and social events during his visit in 1975. On his visit he was more interested in finding out the sources of India's culture and tenets of civilization. The history of India and its story of invasions by foreigners present the marks of wound and ruins.

*India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990) stands closest to the idea of home coming for Naipaul. It marks Naipaul's surfacing after a long quest amongst the now diminishing ripples of socio-political-cultural paradoxes of India. He sees a million mutinies breaking out in the margins: Mutinies of castes, of class, and of gender. He sees these rebellions as positive movements towards the restoration of India. Naipaul observes that the dark shrouds, holding beneath them centuries of violence are being torn apart; structures of dominance are being dismantled. Naipaul finds India in its offices, kitchens, galleries and chawls; in Dalit rebellions and in women's movements. In the very same sights that had shocked him into a rage *An Area of Darkness* (1964) he now sees positive movement.

*India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990) was published after thirty years of second travel writing *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977) that refers to his framework of revision of his past visits. This is the work of a great enquiry. He wishes to correct his errors of the past observation of his homeland. He finds India a country of a limitless energy and power and a land of strong determinations. The book is also a realization of the writer's inadequacy to understand India in right perspective. The change in vision makes a great shift from Naipaul's first perceptions recorded in *An Area of Darkness* (1964) and *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977) Although placed twenty-seven years apart in time, both are commentaries on each other and explicit examples of the diasporic forces at work within the writer, of which he is himself unaware. Here are a few examples:

What I hadn't understood in 1962, or had taken too much for granted was the extent to which the country had been remade ... restored to itself...<sup>3</sup>

I had carried in my bones that idea of abjectness and defeat and shame. It was the idea I had taken to India on the slow journey by train and ship in 1962; it was the source of my nerves.<sup>4</sup>

The India I had gone to in 1962 was like a different country.<sup>5</sup>

The India of my fantasy and heart was something lost and irrecoverable. The physical country existed. I could travel to that; I had always wanted to. But on that first journey I was a fearful traveller.<sup>6</sup>

These stand in contrast to the personal insights scattered all over *An Area of darkness* (1964):

The physique of Europe had melted away.... Men had been diminished and deformed; they begged and whined. Hysteria had been my reaction.... It

mattered little through whose eyes I was seeing the East; there had as yet been no time for this type of self-assessment.<sup>7</sup>

Superficial impressions, intemperate reactions.<sup>8</sup>

... the reawakening within India of disputes about language, religion, caste and region. India, it seems, will never cease to require the attribution of a conqueror ... this absence of growth and development ... only a series of beginnings, no final creation.<sup>9</sup>

In a year I had not learned acceptance I had learned my separateness from India ...<sup>10</sup>

The narrative of the trinity of the Indian writings presents anxiety and tension realized, felt and perceived by the novelist. The trinity of Indian travel writings posits his vision of a country of the third world. His narratology presents panoramic view of historical, cultural and ethnic institutions and the influencing forces of western world and the scientific advancement. His Diaspora depicts frustration, agony, sense of alienation, rootlessness and writer's own fraudulence. V S Naipaul is frank in his revelation. His vision in the first book is anti-Indian, in the second writing, it deals with decline, ruins and wounds and in the last travelogue it propounds Naipaul's vision of reconciliation. *An Area of Darkness* (1964) defines his personal chemistry of imagined Hindu India and disparity that existed between actual and ideal. His imaginary places proved as shadows in his onward journey. *India A wounded Civilization* (1977) expresses the pliant attitude and Naipaul's existential loss. *India A Million Mutinies Now* (1990) is a different version of his home land. Naipaul vision of Indian diaspora has a sense of immediacy.

**References**

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