

Post-Colonial Elements in the Works of V. S Naipaul

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ABSTRACT

The paper highlights a unique ability of V.S. Naipaul. Naipaul literary works represents imagination unoccupied the subject, He attempt to give a quality of myth to what was agreed, pretty ridiculous, required the courage. India – A wounded civilization gives a very sensitive picture of socio-political condition of India, he addresses Indians as people without vision and creativity, Indian civilization is a sick civilization and it started shrinking with the inventions of Arabs who brought Islam religion, there were no collective action in Indian context only they appeared for individual, he is of the opinion that India was like a jewel in British crown, though it plundered year after year it never learned any lesson

Keywords: Hindu, civilisation, darkness, cultural, colonial, economic, socio-political and experience

INTRODUCTION

Naipaul's writings dealt with cultural confusion of the third world and the problem of the outsider, a picture of his own experience as an Indian in the West-Indies. Naipaul is the product of a distinct combination of circumstances. He found the squalor of Trinidad stifling to his spirit. The Hindu family life seemed irrelevant and meaningless, within the family he was closest to his father, the pain of whose frustrated life he felt and shared acutely. His father, Seepersad Naipaul, was a correspondent for the Trinidad Guardian. He also published short stories. When Naipaul was six, the family moved to Port of Spain, the capital. Seepersad Naipaul died of a heart attack in 1953 without witnessing the success of his son as a writer. At the age of 18, he had written his first novel, which was rejected by the publisher.

Naipaul, and Conrad from whom Naipaul derives a literary from and his many concerns (his feeling for "lost" souls, "lost" countries) both write according to Achebe stuff which "smartly restores" the Whiteman's "comforting myths" about Africa. Conrad's Heart of Darkness, Achebe calls, "foolishly sensational and pretentious"; and Naipaul's work on India, Africa and Latin, America "pretentious drivel" (AWAW, 12) certainly, blame the colonial past, and the colonial hangover. But at some point, Naipaul thesis stares you right in the face. This is very much Naipaul's thesis about post-colonial societies.

It's precisely "the habits of a people and their attitudes to life and society" that Naipaul sets out to examine in India: A Wounded Civilization. And the conclusion that he draws at the end of the book is astonishingly similar to the theme that Elima highlighted: "The crisis of India is not political... Nor is the crisis only economic. These are only aspects of the larger crisis, which is that of a decaying civilization, where the only hope lies in further swift decay." (IWC, 164) If Zaire gives the impression of a country "trapped and static", resulting in a sense of void, India reinforces it an ancient civilization where once "Hindu speculation soar (ed) high." (IWC, 166) Therefore, the nihilism that Naipaul perceives in India is a qualified nihilism not total as in Mobutu's Zaire.

To prove his thesis, Naipaul adopts a pragmatic approach. What he sees and hears around in India, he relates to men who reflect or transmit culture, to concepts, assumptions such as Dharma and Karma at the back of Hindu attitudes. He examines Gandhi and R.K. Narayan as more or less representing the old morality and Vijay Tendulkar and Ananthamurti as reflecting the incipient "new morality", whereby individuals realizing the inadequacy of past myths strike out on their own.

Many of Naipaul's observations on Gandhi would be hard to dispute. Gandhi at the age of nineteen goes to England and doesn't see anything about the country and its people worth recording. He lives in South Africa for twenty years but forgets to say anything about Africans. Where ever he goes, he carries with him his "fierce-absorption", his fears of meat and drink, of sex, and of pollution. Later when he gets back to India, his radical politics gets swallowed up in his religious searching and preaching-with result Gandhi gives no ideology to India, no "new code of survival", no "racial sense" that

could submerge the evils of caste and untouchability. The worst thing that could happen to Gandhi was his Mahatmahood. While Gandhi's obsessions are a fact, Naipaul's ascription of them to Hinduism is rather unconvincing. One can protest that Gandhi's obsessions are a fact; Naipaul's ascription of them to Hinduism is rather unconvincing. One can protest that Gandhi is a typical, and so are many of our god men (especially the learned ones) whom the Hindu society periodically throws up, and many of whom India exports for foreign consumption. But it is patent that the ordinary Hindu has two faces, the excessively worldly and the exuberantly godly, both coexisting in the same person, but without interaction, without contamination.

A casual statement by R.K. Narayan that "India will go on" gains meaning, reveals an attitude to life, of quietism and acceptance. And one understands that this ingrained attitude among Hindus, so well exemplified in Narayan, leaves no room for any "new morality" to develop. Today, therefore, most Indians are their caste or clan, and whatever security or identity they have is conferred on them by their allegiance to caste. Naipaul's criticism on this point cannot be set aside, for we know how deeply caste has played havoc with our perception out attitudes, our politics. And there is still no let-up in caste frenzy or virulence. Amidst so much squalor and dereliction, both moral and physical, the need for the famous Hindu calm, the need for religion, so disproportionately seen on the surface is perhaps understandable. Unless you have religion, or a set of reliable reflexes to see you through the ugly, the squalid, India is bound to be a disturbing country. And what Naipaul does-and we resent his doing this is to dismantle our defence mechanisms, those reflexes which either long habit or a sheer desire to live has built in us over the years the reflexes which the essential duplicity of post colonial cultures sustain. It is this duplicity that Naipaul points to in his task of social deconstruction. As he analyses, he succeeds in un-covering the deep ambivalence within them. One of the ambivalent meanings is always privileged and dominantly displayed; for instance, the meaning of Dharma: "At its noblest, it (Dharma) combines self-fulfilment and truth to the self with the ideas of action as its own spiritual reward, man as a holy vessel (IWC, 169)

While the other meaning is suppressed by the culture's sleight of hand: a meaning which "reconciles men to servitude do thy duty, even if it be humble" says the Gita" (IWC 169). Dharma is an elastic concept, can be creative or crippling, and hides within it class or caste interests. This deep cultural ambivalence is again seen in broad perspective when Naipaul points out that "Hindu speculation can soar high; but Hindu religious practices are elemental, and spirituality for most people is a tangible good, magic. (IWC 166) As a result of this ambivalence ideas in India remain, separate from beliefs and practices, and where democracy is little more than power politics almost "an affair of head-counting and floor-crossing (IWC 168).

Even Gandhi's non-violence, once "a quickened of social conscience", gets devalued into a form of "non-doing... social indifference." It turns into a means for securing "undisturbed calm", gradually merges into the concept of Karma, "the Hindu Killer"-which is "a religious response to worldly defeat"-preparing, in the meantime, the individual for the final "withdrawal (25-26) Social change may occur tardily, by sheer momentum of history, but the Indian ethos with its attendant attitudes will remain intact. There will be continuity. India will go on, but no qualitative difference. The post-colonial societies, in short, hold forth no hope, no "new idea of human excellence." (IWC 174) They are doomed; they occupy vast areas of darkness.

It's apparent from this, then that the difference between Achebe and Naipaul is radical in attitude and perception. But does this mean that Achebe doesn't see any cracks in his society, ambivalences in his culture, and is out to whitewash Africa and set himself up as a conscious propagandist? Though Achebe's overtly intellectual stance proclaims his African militancy, his fiction tells a different story. The novelist usually tells the whole truth, and this qualifies in an important way his ostensible ideological stance and meets Naipaul more than halfway.

Naipaul writes in his essay "A New King for the Congo: Mobutu and the Nihilism of Africa", that the young African students who "can talk of Stendhal and Fanon", with their new knowledge and idealism, "will find themselves unsupported by their society." Of course, for most of them, there will be jobs in the government, and they will all be "Mobutists to a man." (REP, 193) Achebe in *No Longer at Ease*, to support as it were Naipaul's thesis, traces the story of Obi Okonkwo, a young man educated in England, who, to mix Naipaul's words, awakens "to ideas, history, a knowledge of injustice and a sense of their own dignity", but ultimately finds himself "unsupported by society." (REP, 193) The post colonial society is corrupt and brooks no idealism. As the novel opens, Obi is already in the dock, accused and found guilty of having taken a bribe of twenty pounds. The crucial problem of a post-colonial society is posed in the novel: Disinherited from one's folk culture, and exposed to the alien, imbibing the latter's values through its literature, its socio-political theories, how does one come to terms with this "double heritage", the native and the European?" (ALRC, 106) Mr. Green in the novel is a thorough colonialist; he believes in the supreme the white race and has no respect for Africans. But his work ethic is beyond reproach: "Here was a man who did not believe in a country, and yet worked hard for it" (ALRC, 82) harder than

the natives, comments the novelist. And, paradoxically, it is Mr. Green's words, which seem to come true in the novel. "The African is corrupt through and through", emphasises Mr. Green at one point, "...I'm all for equality and all that... But equality won't alter facts." (ALRC, 31) The African has been sapped mentally and physically, it's true, but Mr. Green wonders:

"We have brought him western education. But what use is it to him? There is no single Nigerian who is prepared to forgo a little privilege in the interests of his country. From your ministers down to your most junior clerk" what is true of Nigeria is true of India, only the intensity and the proportion of corruption being infinitely greater.

In *A Man of the People*, Achebe offers a convincing portrait of a corrupt minister who uses strong-arm tactics to get to the top and stay there until the obligation of a military coup intervenes with the fortunes of the corrupt politician to see him behind bars. The people in the novel are shown as fickle-minded, unprincipled, politically cynical and resigned to fate.

They all support the minister, Chief Nanga, knowing full well that he is corrupt, but when overthrown by a military coup, they change sides overnight. People lack moral concern, act in a cowardly manner. Naipaul comments on such people in one of his interviews: "They are colonials, in a type of perpetual colonial situation a sense of responsibility is what the colonial doesn't have" (AWAW, 42). Odili Samalu, the narrator, comments on the morale of post-colonial people when his lawyer friend Max gets murdered during electioneering and his fiancée Eunice avenges Max's murder: "Had his spirit waited for the people to demand redress it would have been waiting still, in the rain and out in the sun." (AWAW, 22) It was a satire of corruption and power struggles in an African state. The central characters are the Minister of Culture, Nanga, the man of the people, and teacher Odili, an African Lucky Jim, who tells the story. Odili stands against the government, but not because of ideological reasons. He has personal interests: Nanga has seduced his girl friend. Their political confrontation becomes violent, Nanga's thugs inflict havoc and chaos, and the army responds by staging a coup. After this, one wonders whether there are two versions, Naipaul's and Achebe's or one version of the post colonial society that they both envisage.

Reema Kansal and Amit Sarwal discuss how Achebe engages with the question of the governance of the community, and also of the individual self in *Things Fall Apart*. They suggested that it is the interaction between individual societies, which gives the unique character to the Igbo community of the text. He has many unpleasant things to tell about us, and he says them without reprieve or extenuation. Some are angry with him because he is an outsider, and they want to deny him the right to use an insider's knowledge, a knowledge which in our honest moments we recognise as truth Achebe is an insider and he echoes the sentiments of many when one of his characters, that is, Odili rebukes Jean, a charming American lady, who drives him round the slums of Lagos at night: "Your accusation may be true but you have no right to make it. Leave it to us and don't contaminate our cause by espousing it". (SBL, 66) No wonder, Naipaul's accusations sound like "ultimate irreverence" to those who have, rather unctuously, styled themselves as guardians of Indian culture.

His *Area of Darkness* (1864) is like a personal testament wherein he tries to rediscover his roots, though he lambastes on Indians in the process. Later work, *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977) presents a contrasting picture. In the place lambastes, sardonic and a malicious temper, there is genuine concern and a keen desire to know the civilization of his forefathers. At times, his in born prejudice hampers his study of India.

Naipaul raises the pertinent question of rootlessness and existential crisis of identity. He is acknowledge throughout, the world as a writer of Diaspora because his creative domain reflects the spirit of cult and cultures. He himself can be evaluated of Trinidadian by birth, Indian Brahmin by descent and Western by education and attitude. The creative cosmos of Naipaul offers an existential paradigm that suggests the problem of rootlessness and his characters try their best to locate roots and respect in this dislocated and displaced humanity. Naipaul's "an area of darkness" seems to be modern saga of disgust and despair in the course of seeking the self and the society. But one does object to Naipaul's advocacy of a clean break with the past: "The past has to be seen to be dead: or the past will kill", (IWC, 174) prophesies Naipaul. But to deny one's past completely is to reject one's history. Achebe does not specify which elements of the past are to be revived- for as with India, the wrong elements from the past may be revived and resuscitated into living faiths by populist demagogues and religious phonics. At this point one may have to turn to Wole Soyinka, who has a positive response to offer on how to make sense of one's past how to select from tradition, how to put the people again, in touch with what they have lost.

The concept of civilization has at times also formed a part of the justification by which some groups have exerted control over others. One school of thought says that civilization is a cultural identity. Which represent the broadest level of identification? Linguistically, civilization means, "to dwell in an urban place". Technically, it means human innovation in

the various fields of human activity that is conducive to man's progress on this earth; it is the product of man's intellect and effort in a specific place and at a particular time. Thus, human civilization is a bundle of civilization that has intermixed and has mutually enriched one another throughout the ages. Nations and people have contributed to human civilization, as every nation has its own civilization that flourishes or collapse according to the nation's degree of commitment to the conditions of the civilization act, which always seeks greatness, sublimity and maturity.

He has an ambivalent relation with the land of his ancestors though he deems himself an exile, a nomad, and a bare for colonial and a Brahmin gypsy, „In the preface to the work he reveals his basic attitude to India. Disowning India apparently, he reveals a keen insight in to Indian history, traditions, culture, religion and social-political life and depicts India with uncanny and sharpness of perception of even smallest details. Indeed, this work exposes some of the inherent defects of Indian Civilization with great courage. He writes about familiar area of experience and doings. So he has recourse to metaphors and elevates its importance adding of metaphysics. And he does it all with courage of conviction. Still the blinkers hamper the whole view.

India in keeping with these definitions has achieved political, social, economical, technical, and intellectual progress over the many centuries. Therefore, to opine that the people of pre-independent India have not the existed in a dialogical mode appears to be quite correct. If on the one hand there has been a high degree of political and economic theorizing (Kautily's Arthashastra) there has also been, on other hand, simultaneous growth and development at the socio- philosophic Levels.

However, from a European point of view, such people have always been uncivilized. Whether it is Max Muller in his personal letter or India: A Wounded Civilization most writers have been speaking disapprovingly about India, its people and its civilization. Moreover, the real problem lies in the word „civilization“, which is always used resentfully in the context of India: “I am civilized, you are barbarian,” as the English and the Indians or the Greeks and the Persians. It is now understood that once this destiny was designed the peoples suddenly eclipsed into obscurity and emerged as significant and uncivilized „tribe“ or people fit only to be conquered. And it was in pursuance of this binary, as a gush of anti-Indian strategizing, the English commended and practiced a policy of divided and rule. Again, not only have the colonialist into mis-constructing India for the West, but time and again, even the so called natives have mis-constructed India to meet the white's intellectual appetite and market. V.S Naipaul's reading of India as a “wounded civilization” is a point in instance.

Well that's how perhaps a dialogue should begin between the present and the past. Naipaul is not so naïve as to imagine that the initial motive of the colonial powers was benevolent. In *The Loss of El Dorado* (1969), he traces the history of expeditions to Trinidad, Guiana, Venezuela and the neighbouring islands from 1592 when de Vera landed in Trinidad. The earliest conquerors viz. de barrio from Spain and Raleigh from Britain had chiefly one motive. In fact, all the colonial powers, including the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese, like the British and the Spaniards, laboured under the delusion that there were gold mines in this region. They did not scruple to lure the native Indians into death traps to subject Africa slaves to unspeakable cruelty or treat the rival colonial power with treachery. Naipaul does not gloss over any of these facts, which he has gleaned from learned works of history.

Four of the Naipaul's works have their setting in countries recently liberated from European rule viz. *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958) the title story of the volume *In a Free State* (1971), *Guerillas* (1975) and *A Bend in the River* (1979). The three are grimmer in tone. They expose the hollow rhetoric the leadership that has emerged in the third world. The native dictators, military or civilian, who succeeded to the colonial rulers in the West Indies and Africa, showed no real interest in the welfare of their people. They were power maniacs whose efficiency consisted chiefly in liquidating all opposition to their governments. But no individual dictator lasted very long. They were soon overthrown by equally ruthless rivals. Their subjects had to suffer alternating spells of tyranny and anarchy.

Naipaul directs his wrath especially against the Western media, which treat the coloured people as playthings. For example, when the big man took over the government of the African country in *A bend in the river* the western press was irresponsible in its reporting some of the news paper found good words for the butchery on the coast. (I WC34) The explanation given by one of the characters is that “people are like that about places in which isn't a really interested and where they don't have to live (IWC, 34).”

Naipaul's outlook is anti-primitivist. He values the amenities of civilisation. He is unapologetic about preferring the highway to the bush. Presumably, he considers the western conservationist sentiment irrelevant to the un-development reason of the Africa and the West Indies. V.S. Naipaul thinks that the crisis of India is neither political nor economic but its decaying civilization as it constantly harps upon its mystic past. He thinks that past can be possessed only by intellectual enquiries, scholarship rather than spiritual discipline. He is of the view that “The past has to be seen to be dead or past will

kill". (IWC, 71) There can't be renaissance by exalting old ways. Renewal must be sought by intellectual means. He finds the present situation quite, dismal and gloomy with a kind of intellectual vacuum in Indian Civilization. The poverty of land is reflected in the poverty of the mind. It is the intellectual deficiency and lack of critical and creative ability that are the root causes of decline of the civilization. Referring to Karkar, Naipaul remarks that the Indian ego is under-developed and child like and accustomed to animistic ways of thinking and negative perception (that goes with meditation: Karma etc.) unable to explore the world actively. He finds the Indians very emotional and instinctive. They cannot observe keenly and critically. They find it difficult to withdraw and analyze. They don't have ideas but only obsessions on this account.

An Area of Darkness is a deeply disturbing autobiography. It is at one level the writer search for his ethnic roots. In this book, he hardly tries to know his origin and the culture, history, traditions, religion and socio-political life and depicts India with uncanny sensibility and sharpness of perception of even smallest details the tension between imagination and reality is a strong feature of the book, his attitude has something of Swift's microscopic scrutiny and appalled recoil.

Indians were not only beaten but also defeated so Naipaul says that if India had economic or political problem than it may solve it but the main problem was its wounded civilization. Indians believe in doctrine of Karma, which tells that "We pay this life for what we have done in the past". (IWC, 89) They won't protest against anything as their Karma example, R.K. Narayan's "Vendor of sweets" Gandhiji the Mahatma lay emphasis on individual and not on whole, in his autobiography "My experiments with Truth". He does not mention any single opinion about South-African but highlights only the problems of Indians who are in South-Africa. It shows that Gandhi was not free from individualism so Naipaul says Indians do not have ideas but only obsession.

In his books he highlights his views on India and its civilization but also gives on account of his visits to the ruins of Hampi, Jaipur, Slums of Bombay, rural district of Bengal and Bihar. In which he experienced both past pomp and glory with present barbarism and backwardness. He finds no constructive ideas but only obsession, discussion, empty talk, complaint. He is of the view that frequent attacks of invasion have made Indian civilization wounded. He also condemns Indians for following the foreigners. He is of the view that borrowed institutions to borrowed work, so Indians should and must depend on its own intellectuals.

The starting point of understanding Indian civilization automatically involves a major revolution is consciousness and thought. Therefore, as we engage ourselves with issues like civilization it is important to know what they meant to visionary like Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore in one of his speeches in China during his 1924 tour said, "The word „civilization“ being a European word, we have hardly yet taken the trouble to find its real meaning .Only very lately we have means when they speak of civilization. We ask ourselves, „Has it the same meaning as some word in our own language which denotes for us the idea of human perfection?(RT, LACP, 45) His *An Area of Darkness* is like a personal testament wherein he tries to rediscover his roots, though he lambastes on Indians in the process. Later work, India: "A Wounded Civilization" presents a contrasting picture. In the place lambastes, sardonic and a malicious temper, there is genuine concern and a keen desire to know the civilization of his forefathers. At times, his in born prejudice hampers his study of India.

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Civilization cannot merely be a growing totality of happening that by chance have assumed a particular shape and tendency, which we consider to be excellent. It must be the expression of some guiding moral force that we have evolved in our society for the object of attaining perfection. The Sanskrit word dharma is the nearest synonyms in our language, which occur to me, for the word civilization. In fact, we have no other word except perhaps some newly-coined one, lifeless and devoid of atmosphere. The specific meaning of Dharma is that principle which holds us firm together and leads us to our welfare. The radical meaning of this word is the essential quality of a thing..." (RT, LACP, 58)

Tagore believed that for over a century the prosperous west had been dragging us understand that progress was civilization. But in the India context, the expression-„mechanical progresses as civilization-did not communicate the various sparks of spiritual delight that had been produced from time to time. On the contrary, principle of substance i.e Dharma stood as the perfect substitute for the inner ideal Indian Civilization. And if this were so how can it even have a crippling effect on the

Indian mind and thought/ thus the concept of civilization is centered upon the two ideas of in-death knowledge" and dharma.

During his visits to ruined Hampi-Vijayanagar, Jaipur and slums of Bombay, rural districts of Bihar and Bengal, he meets with squalor, poverty, starvation and backwardness. In North Bihar and Bundi Kotech region of Rajasthan, he finds poor fields, rugged men, huts, Monsoon mud with ideas of human possibility almost extinct. But everyone secure in his Karma, resigned to his lot passively living a simple life in holy poverty. The ruins combine past pomp and glory with present squalor and barbarism and backwardness, presenting a dismal picture of a country intellectually barren, weak and vulnerable to outside threat. He finds no constructive ideas and visions, only obsessions, discussions empty talk, complaining habit and sweet surrender to fate.

Thus, it appears that Naipaul in *India: A Wounded Civilization* bears neo-colonial allegiances to the western categories of civilization. He falls in line with those writers who wish to write keeping the western market in mind. Therefore, his narrative carries the images of India in distress, which is keeping with his fastidious repugnance of India. Most of his descriptions detail the dirt, the filth, the rags, the deformities and the disease, the corruption and apathy and fatalism.

After nearly thirty years of power of the Congress has, understandably, become the system. But where does the system begin and end? Does it take in religion, the security of security of caste and clan Indian ways of perceiving, Karma, the antique serfdom? But no Indian cares to take political self-examination that far. No Indian can take himself to the stage where he might perceive that fault lie within the Civilization itself, that the failure and the cruelties of India might implicate all Indians... (IWC, 148).

Naipaul here uses the word „system“, which implies that the system is a whole a central essence, which claims every part as „darkness“ with „wound“. May be his Naipaul's logic is consistent but it is not heterogeneous. The question again is why should, he be mocking at the efforts Mahatma Gandhi to bring about „Ramraj“. Perhaps, he considers himself as privileged „he“ while the Indians are always the subjected „them“ and „they“ it appears that Naipaul's allegiance to the western concept of civilization is not convincing enough. One should see and understand that every society has its own civilization, which is the essence of its characteristics and the epitome of its components and ingredients. Civilization is identity. This conception is in disagreement with Naipaul and with what is known in Western studies as „oneness of civilization“, meaning Western civilization. The historian Arnold Toynbee has criticized this conception, too, as he says that the theory of oneness of civilization is an error in which many contemporary Westerners have fallen because of the pressure of social environment and the allusive outward aspect of Western civilization.

Naipaul thinks that highest skills and cleverest vision are indispensable to make India technically advance. So he hopes that possibilities of a true new beginning can be emergence of intellect after a long spiritual night. Throughout the work Naipaul lays emphasis on a sound scientific temper, a constructive, positive and rational outlook, a clear vision of future, unhampered by the shackles of the past, an extraordinary intellectual effort unfuddled by instincts and blind impulses and a strong racial sense of identity and strong spirit of individualism which alone can rebuild India into a strong stable, free and unique civilization from its present wounded state.

CONCLUSION

Naipaul sums up the main drawbacks of Hinduism thus, Hinduism has not been good enough for the millions. It has exposed us to a thousand years of defeat and stagnation. It has given no ideas of the state. It has enslaved one fourth of the population (men without a country) and always left the whole fragmented into pieces and vulnerable. Its philosophy of withdrawal has diminished men intellectually and not equipped them to respond to challenges. It has stifled growth so that again and again Indian history repeated itself.

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