



**AN ANALYSIS OF HOMELESSNESS IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S AN AREA OF DARKNESS**

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Diasporic consciousness and exilic self, and the resultant sensibility that stands as the core genesis to cross-cultural or expatriate or diasporic discourse or writing is the perspective through which Naipaul's Janus-faced relationship and affiliation with India needs to be studied and analysed. Most prominently, diasporic consciousness is being perceived as the mental flights of a people, who are in continual pursuit of reconstructing their present from a past that is lost to them. Their roots shoot down only to strike against a frozen, fractured consciousness and then search for crevasses - to anchor on to, and the diasporic discourse is born. It is claimed that diaspora does not refer to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea. Discussing and analysing the hybridities and heterogeneities in diasporic identities, which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference, it is because this New World is constituted for us as place, a narrative of displacement, that it gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to lost origins, to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning. And yet, this return to the beginning can neither be fulfilled nor required, and hence is the beginning of the imaginary, or symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search and discovery. Sometimes this search and discovery, or rediscovery lands one in a terrain of anxiety, ecstasy and frustration as the very individual or author discovers the homeland different from what he had been dreaming of and what he had been told of the purity of the homeland.

V.S. Naipaul has this discovery as his recurrent theme in his writings. Naipaul's writing career can be seen in terms of a journey, an infinite rehearsal and meditation on his diasporic experience as an Indian West Indian and a continual reevaluation of the situation of his double exile. In attempting over a long career, to write and revise his own location as twice-born immigrant, both within Trinidad as the descendant of an indentured Indian and again within Britain, he has constantly shown that the stories of colonialism and its post-imperial aftermath engendered what could be called narratives of anxiety. Such narrative is a process that is delicately balanced, representing a search for a cultural and psychic equilibrium which constantly approaches self-destruction but contains within it the seeds of self-discovery. Unlike those who dream of imaginary homelands to adjust to the trauma of displacement, he has opted for homelessness. This homelessness offers Naipaul greater liberty and a broader framework in analysing the variant nuances of diasporic essences.

As a man without a nation, choosing residence in a nation that is not his own, Naipaul seemed to defy nationness as a valorising category. Naipaul's status as a twice or thrice removed diasporic writer with nationlessness as mark of liberty and a homeland in imagination provides him a unique position. His three books spanning three decades of his engagement with India provide an unprecedented opportunity to record the growth of an individual writer within the framework of his continuing encounters with his homeland.

Naipaul shares a very turbulent relationship with India, his homeland that dwindles in imaginary and symbolic, and this turbulent relationship finds expression in Naipaul's deep seated concern for the land of his ancestors; and his vision is being coloured by the very same diasporic consciousness that birthed his quest, he is caught within the ripples of his own making in his first real encounter with India.

Naipaul's works can be broadly divided into three phases and during the three phases of his works, which can be characterised, respectively, by "mediation, alienation, and syncretism, exile shapes the relationship between Naipaul and his readers" (153) as observed by M.M Bakhtin and P.N. Medvedev's *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. In the initial phase, which includes the works of his 1950s and 60s, the author mediates between the differing aspects of his identity, between Trinidad and England; these works, which look back to the colony, use irony and satire to bridge the different ideological



and social evaluations of the author and his intended English readers. In the second phase, which comprises his writings of the 1960s and 70s and his books on India, he expresses alienation from English society, whose impersonality and decay he describes, and from colonial and postcolonial societies, whose problems he continues to analyse. These works often express disgust and repulsion. Then begins the third phase in Naipaul's writing career in which, he reconciles his New World and Old World and identifies and comprehends the world as a changing one of diverse realities and irrationalities. This period bridges the differences between the author and his English readers through nostalgia and a sharing of humanistic values. The titular metaphor of the mutiny on ship combines an old way of seeing the world with a new: that is, the author still sees a decay in the world about him, but this change, he points out in the course of the book, may be a necessary stage in Indians' coming to grips with their postcolonial identity. In this third phase of Naipaul's works, two extreme attitudes towards the writer and writing, both of which have tended to isolate Naipaul from the people he writes about, are syncretised.

The three writings of Naipaul on India span the course of his career. Naipaul's first book on India, *An Area of Darkness* is the outcome of his first face-to-face encounter with India, which has so far been to him only an idea - an idea that he had inherited in Trinidad. Naipaul's first encounter with the harsh realities of India, its distress and pain affected and disturbed Naipaul more strappingly than its newly born independence. The dominant nationalistic spirit of that time pervading the Indian domain and India as a nation in building could not catch the attention of the creative self of Naipaul, instead the callous realities of a Third World postcolonial people trapped in impoverishment and misery, pain and squalor of futile mimicry and degeneration became the source of his very personal account of his experiences and disappointments. The kind of pure India that his ancestors had made him dream of is lost forever in his first encounter with India and this marked the germination of the diasporic insecurities in him, which soon got transformed into an urge for escape and flight. This book marks the initial juncture in Naipaul's development of diasporic consciousness as a writer of the diaspora because for the first time Naipaul's imaginary lost world finds an encounter with the realities of that lost world, which creates that in-between, which forms the prominent strands of diasporic discourse.

In *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul observes through an exploration of the autobiographical dimensions of his relation to India. In this work Naipaul traces the progress of his grandfather's migration from India to Trinidad where he recreated a simulacrum in miniature of his lost Indian world. The work goes on to describe the gradual contraction and disruption of the seemingly complete world of Trinidad's Little India. India functioned for Naipaul as a "resting place for the imagination. It is 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" (29). India's unknown character is symbolised by a similar image to that which Naipaul uses in *A House for Mr. Biswas* to evoke abandonment and desolation, as if to suggest Naipaul's sense that, cut off from the land of his ancestors, he is, figuratively speaking, and an orphan. India is imagined by him as shrouded in darkness, "as darkness surrounds a hut at evening, though for a little way around the hut there is still light" (32). In contrast to the notion that he can find India by looking within himself, and in an admission that his journey to India has been a disappointment. In this opposing motif, for Naipaul, India remains to an important degree elusive, mysterious and unknown. *An Area of Darkness* therefore forms a narrative of unfulfilled expectations and records Naipaul's failure to discover in India the ancestral homeland he had imagined it to be: "India had not worked its magic on me. It remained the land of my childhood, an area of darkness; like the Himalayan passes, it is closing up again, as fast as I withdrew from it, into a land of my myth" (266). Naipaul shares the same condition and situation as that of the Indian repatriates from the West Indies who flocked to India, only to discover that they no longer 'belonged' to this place and, then besieged the ship, begging to be taken back to the West Indies, which they had accepted as their home unknowingly. He sees them as symbols of the placelessness of the Trinidad Hindu community (61). Naipaul discovers that his conception of an Indian identity has no echo in the minds of those he meets, whose identity is defined in terms of region or caste.

An important aspect of Naipaul's analysis of the Hindu character - the very effort to think in such general terms might appear bound to slip into caricature - is his notion that Indians are incapable of perceiving in an objective way the world about them. He attaches a complex of assumptions to this proposition, arguing that Hindus lead instinctual lives governed by magic and ritual and by caste, lives characterised by self-absorption and social indifference.



The dehumanisation is intended to reflect the attitudes of a society in which the individual is supernumerary - as in the case of a woman sweeping the dam in Rajasthan with a rag, which Naipaul perceives as denied humanity by the nullity of her labour: “She is hardly a person” (75). Such figures appear to constitute for Naipaul a threat to his own sense of self and of human possibility: “Men had been diminished and deformed; they begged and whined. Hysteria had been my reaction, and a brutality dictated by a new awareness of myself as a whole human being, and a determination, touched with fear, to remain what I is” (16). His reaction at this reduction of human possibility expresses itself in a manner whereby sympathy becomes virtually indistinguishable from revulsion: “It is compassion like mine, so strenuously maintained, that denied humanity to many” (263).

Without any doubt, Naipaul’s writings on India stems from his individualistic perception of India, which has been structured through his variant experiences in Trinidad, his interaction with the Indian communities in the West Indies, encounter with the other in the West Indies, the cultural inheritance in his grandmother’s house, and his anxieties and fears for his own identity and self-hood.

As Naipaul grew up and is in quest of opportunities in shaping his writing career and making himself known in the world, the metropolis England attracted Naipaul’s imagination and here he thought that he could produce something worth. Though England became his residence and English his attitude, yet he could not be able to fully integrate himself to Englishness. But landing in the metropolis, Naipaul began to perceive the West Indies (Trinidad), his place of birth and the Whole Third World as the domain of people trapped in impoverishment and colonial mimicry. Here three aspects need to be marked; Naipaul as a diasporic migrant with an exilic self (of leaving the country), having a residence in the metropolis (England) with English attitude, if not Englishness and India laying in his dream as a sacred land. So with this background when Naipaul lands in India and encounters the realities of India, what gets yielded is frustration and hopelessness, that Naipaul attempts at releasing through his book, *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul’s status as a diasporic writer and the problematic fissure it created in his Indian sensibility has recorded for posterity the deep psychological violence caused by colonial rule and its legacies of confusion, alienation and psychological exile which the world has to continue to live with. Naipaul’s initial bitterness generated a unique sense of detachment, which in addition to being essential to any original quest has yielded transparency to his struggle to establish a connection with India.

Though Naipaul has been criticised for his bitter resentment and presentation of India, yet it is to be understood that as a diasporic writer Naipaul lands in India as a quest of his root and what he discovers in India, his and his ancestor’s dreamland is mere frustration. But Naipaul should not be misunderstood. Naipaul makes a well-ordered search for the roots of the maladies that ail India. The other aspect is that Naipaul always wishes to be in a state of homelessness that provides him more opportunities and amenities for exploration. This is in fact a predicament of a diasporic writer. So, Naipaul’s writings on India are not only the outcome of his quest for India but are also a unique record of the making of a diasporic writer, of his development, of his anguish, rage, search and finally of his successful mental restoration of India from a pattern of painful fragmentation to wholeness.

## REFERENCES

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