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Research Article



V. S. Naipaul's Motiveless Malignity: A Study of Cultural and Emotional Past of his *India Essays*

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Abstract

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, the Nobel Laureate, is a celebrated name in the world of literature. He is known for his precise and remarkable prose writings. He won numerous accolades for his precision in fiction and non-fiction. His works are replete with insight and acute observation of master craftsmanship. He was an Indian-origin Trinidadian-born British Citizen. During his upbringing, he got the Indian atmosphere at his home but he could never connect himself the way his ancestors did with the land and the people. He, himself, admits that he only knew his mother and father beyond that his ancestry is “blurred”. From his childhood, he heard so many stories about India that there developed a sort of fascination for the land. He decided to visit India and finally, he paid his first visit in the 60s. India has been a land of wonders for people around the world. Those, who never had been here read about the land and the people through the travelogues. He wrote three books on India which are known as The Indian Trilogy. Though they are controversial in nature, the minute observation of the author is laudable. Apart from the trilogy he wrote six essays between (1962 and 2006) namely – *In the middle of the journey* (1962), *Jamshed into Jimmy* (1963), *A Second Visit* (1967), *The election in Ajmer* (1971), *Looking and not Seeing: the Indian way* (2005-2006), *India Again: the Mahatma and After* (2005-2006). The paper is an endeavor to highlight his prejudices, his biased nature, and his malignity towards India and her people.

Keywords: Corruption, Prejudice, Biasness, Critique, Non-fiction, Marginality, Human Emotions, Culture, Diaspora

Naipaul was associated to India through his ancestry. His father came to Trinidad on indentured labour in the 1880s and later settled down there. Naipaul wrote three travelogues and six essays for his readers. They are- *An Area of Darkness*, *India: a wounded civilization* and *India: a Million Mutinies now and India: Essays*. But when one reads his works on India, one feels that there is utter frustration, dejection, prejudice, and biasness eclipse his narration. *Area of Darkness* was banned in India because of the negative portrayal of the country and the people and it created a lot of controversies. His exasperation is beyond comprehension. It is an obvious truth that no country in the world is perfect but he sees too many problems in India alone. He sees only darkness, backwardness, corruption, and filth but the fact is there are many countries, which are more backward than India. In every essay, he tries to highlight one or the other problem and from the beginning to the end he is persistent in his effort to tarnish the image and prove his point of view. In this regard, he stands quite opposite of those people, who see India differently. For instance, Mark Twain acknowledges the contribution of India and eulogies her in grand manner.

India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, The mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the grandmother of tradition. Our most valuable and the most attractive material in the history of man is treasured up in India only.

A. G. Gardiner visited India and narrated his experience in his famous essay ‘A Girl with the Basket’ where he describes a refugee girl, whose proud and self-dependent attitude

impressed the writer so much and assured him that India will soon become one of the advanced nations of the world. But India failed to cast such an impression on Naipaul. Though the critique of India is not a new thing and Naipaul was not a pioneer in his approach. But if we see the situation from a historical perspective India can be exempted from all the changes. Let me take a few examples from history, itself, that could be useful in ascertaining my point of view in this regard. England, a former colony of the Roman Empire, had no national language and literature till the twelfth century. In that period Mohammed Gauri invaded the famous Somnath Temple in Gujarat and looted it seventeen times. Nadir Shah Attacked Delhi and plundered so much that he exempted his countrymen from tax for three years. Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English invaded and made their colonies here and used the land for draining the wealth in their own country. Celebrated Author and politician Dr. Shashi Tharoor writes in this regard, in his book *An Era of Darkness* that Clive accumulated so much wealth from Bengal during his tenure as Bengal Governor, he bought the largest estates in England and he is considered the richest man in Europe of that time. Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453. It could not endure a single attack and vanished from history. Persia could stand to the Muslim invaders and became modern-day Iran. So many Invasions, plundering, and long colonial rule could not threaten the spirit of India and She is developing day in and day out.

Casteism, mismanagement, corruption, political ups, and downs etc. are some of the major issues that Naipaul raises in his essays. Among them, Casteism is the recurring issue that comes over and over in his works on India. Naipaul's critique on the system is described in the story of Kanakchand and Abhayraj. In the story, different treatment is given by the tutor. Kanakchand as the untouchable boy is threatened very badly only because of the caste. "The untouchable boy, Kanakchand, has no books on the next day. He is put of the class and in the afternoon ABhayraj sees him 'miserable and downcast....'" (*Area of Darkness* p.64)

In this connection, Naipaul is not the only one, who is highlighting the issue. Before him, many great reformers have raised the issue and tried their level best to eradicate this anathema. Celebrated Novelist Munshi Prem Chand has highlighted the same issue in many of his stories— "Thakur ka Kuaah", "Doodh ka Dam". Naipaul singles out the problem, but he does not share with the readers that the constitution of India has insulated them with the SC and ST act and has abolished the untouchability in article 17 and its practice in any form is formidable and punishable. To bring them into the mainstream of society the constitution has given them the benefit of the reservation in jobs and politics. Shashi Tharoor writes in this connection:

Some critics point out that the British can scarcely be blamed for the pre-existing divisions in Indian society, notably caste, which divided (and still divides) the majority Hindu population into mutually exclusive and often incomplete social stratification. Fair enough, but it is also true that the British, knowingly or unknowingly, helped solidify and perpetuate the iniquities of the caste system. Since the British came from a hierarchical society with an entrenched class system, they instinctively tended to look for a similar system in India. (*An Era of Darkness*, p. 123)

The first essay, "In the Middle of the Journey", expresses his anguish and disgust during his

first visit to India. He came to the land of his ancestors with high hope but the moment he arrived they all shattered to pieces. He writes in the opening paragraph of the essay “But now after six months in India my fascination with the big is tinged with disquiet.” This rootlessness is the cause of anxiety in Naipaul’s personality that he expresses in his fiction and non-fiction when it comes to identity and belongingness. He is of Indian origin in Trinidad, Trinidadian born Indian origin in England, and for Indians, he is Indian origin Trinidadian born British Citizen. Naipaul feels that though India has won her Freedom a long ago but still there is a colonial mindset. People are free but their colonial values and culture have not been shattered yet. The majority of the people still carry the remnants of their colonial past. V.S. Naipaul’s post-colonial literature has become incredibly popular because of its focus on topics related to globalization, marginalization, migration, repatriation, forced displacement, digestion, multiculturalism, and hybridity. They discussed the problems and struggles of the colonial people who were the victims of the ruthless political arrangements. Naipaul has a tenderness for India due to its ancient glory and the past achievements but in the present, she seems to him as an ache and he always wishes to separate himself.

The essay “Jamshed into Jimmy” shares with the readers the ‘box-wallah’ culture of Calcutta now Kolkata. Calcutta had been the capital of the Empire and they developed the city ‘in the image of England’. This city is reminiscent of the Raj, which reminds us how much they exploited Bengal during their reign. The particular tendency to Anglicized one’s personality was just the colonial impact. In every nook and corner of Calcutta, where ever you go, you find the imprint of the British Empire. The roads, the buildings, and the architecture of the city remind you the British Raj. The past legacy, splendour and the Grandeur impressed the writer but it was nothing but a city of filth, poverty, and hopelessness for him. It gave him much shock that the city, which was designed to accommodate two million people, more than six million people were living on its pavements and in its ‘Bastees’. As the essay progresses the writer starts, as it is his signature mark of his, describing people and the environment around him. Bengalis are not attractive to him because they do not give him much importance as he does not know how to speak Bengali. For this reason, he feels alienated. He finds people lazy and arrogant; he quotes an unknown south Indian writer who says that Bengalis are very untidy people. He proves this statement by describing the dingy pavements of Calcutta which were dyed red with betel juice. This particular description shows that in India people are not much conscious for cleanliness and personal hygiene. Therefore, in India, we see untidiness and dirt because of the habit of the people. Even this happens now-a- days also, people through garbage on the road, empty vapors in streets, spit on the roads shamelessly with Gutka, pan masala or pan in their mouth. Cleanliness has been a major issue in India, to see the seriousness of the situation, the present government launched the campaign ‘Swachh Bharat Abhiyan’ on the hundredth fiftieth birthday of Mahatma Gandhi in 2014. Sir Vidya talks about the faded glory of the city. In 1911 the British shifted their capital from Calcutta to Delhi. The four cities i.e., Delhi, Bombay now Mumbai, Calcutta now Kolkata, and Madras now Chennai were developed by the British. But in all four of them, Calcutta has the true stamp of the British. One by one Naipaul expresses his thoughts about these four major cities. For him Delhi is a ‘Disaster, a

mock- Imperial joke'. It is neither British nor Indian. It seems as if this one is only for parades rather for the people. Madras, one of the finest complexes of eighteenth-century British architecture outside Britain, is 'Lazily Colonial'. Bombay, which is the economic capital of India, 'Indeed this city, the best-run in India', up to some extent gives him the impression of a cosmopolitan sense but he rejects it 'Cosmopolitan to the point of characterlessness.

In the description of the box-wallah culture and the box-wallahs Naipaul presents the picture of the westernized Indians. They seem to have materialized the dream of Macaulay, who once presented 'The downward filtration theory' for the metamorphosis of India so that the empire could sustain for an indefinite time period. But in his lifetime, he could not live long to see this dream coming into reality. In post-colonial India, these box-wallahs seem to present the dream come true of Macaulay, who wanted to transform the entire nation, his lifelong wish to have such Indians, who should have color and blood of Indian ancestry but must be English in their thought and outlook. The lifestyle of the box-wallah community suggested that it avowed to sustain the English customs and tradition more dearly than the rest of the communities in India. Their life is Anglo-Centric. Lifestyle, homes, education, food habits, hobbies, hardly any aspect of their life could have left which did not get transformation. Ironically, Naipaul calls them the easy blend of East and West.

The essay, "A Second Visit" is much more acerbic and pinpointed than the others in India essays. The essay begins in the familiar tone of his satiric, ruthless and unsympathetic prose. As the title suggests everywhere he sees tragedy but up to some extent if we analyze closely and ponder over the matter for a minute, we find that little has changed since the time of the writing of this essay. The writer describes an unknown palace, he did not mention any location or name in the essay, he simply calls this palace 'The nondescript Lucknow style'. Those who visit India for seeing the ancient monuments and the palaces in the old cities. At once Naipaul rejects them and calls it the 'Hoax of India'. From all the writings of Naipaul about India, one thing is clearly understood and perceptible he is on the mission of deriding everything. He acts like a cyclone that is out to destroy each and everything, which comes in its way. Whatever he sees and comes across with he leaves no stone unturned to find fault with it. No country in the world is perfect, if it is there, it is a Utopia that exists in imagination and literature only. There are many countries in the world that are poorer and more backward than India. But Naipaul had a special love for India, therefore, he saw only darkness here. One can be amazed after going through his travelogues and essays that nothing could attract him and his desire to praise the country. History is replete with humongous examples to where India has given her rich contribution. But it is very strange and sad that intellectuals like Naipaul ignored all the facts and saw only 'Darkness'.

In his first visit he painted the dark picture of India in the *Area of Darkness*. He, himself, said that his bitter experience motivated him to separate himself from his ancestral land. As far as the second part of this essay is concerned, it seems that he carries and forwards the same bitterness, that he showed in *Area of Darkness*. This time he targets the culture of India. He begins part two with the description of some person who claimed to have the power of walking on the water. Despite the claim that man fails miserably. This particular description reminds

the story from the Bible, where Jesus Christ walks on water and amazes his first disciples. After spending his time in the wilderness and defeating Satan in his attempt of temptation, he returns to his homeland Nazareth, where he performs extraordinary things like- making healthy of the sick people and even making alive the dead ones. As all know that Naipaul is a keen admirer of the west, when it comes to the west, he is less critical or showers encomium for the achievements and the progress that it made but he is harsh towards those countries, which is branded as the third world. Therefore, he wants to suggest in the opening paragraph of the second part that magic is the monopoly of the west and only they have the power to perform such complex things. If any other imitates the west for the same thing it will fail miserably. He suggests that a country like India, is ruled not with the intellect but with the 'Ritual and Myth'. Because Naipaul declares India, an intellectual failure country. In his description, he takes up the three Great men of India. Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave. Through these personalities he tries to draw a side-by-side comparison of their working culture and ideologies.

He incorporates the essay "Modern India" (1899) by Swami G, in the discussion. In brief, he brings to the surface the main point of the essay or we can say that he picks those points, where he is easily able to find loopholes and can find the chances to criticize by taking reference from a Great Yogi. All around the world people know and study Swami Vivekananda. As far as his point of view is concerned, he never showered false praise for the country. Whenever he felt necessary, he criticized it for its failure and never felt himself a narcissist about the past achievement and glories of India. He, himself, has admitted that mere adhesion to the abstraction has ruined this country, he demands for solid action for the upliftment of the country and the poor section of the society. Naipaul, himself, emphasizes this point in the latter part of the essay. It seems that he is echoing the same thing, which the great yogi long ago, even before his coming in the world. He deems *Modern India*, as a link between 'Vivekananda's Political distress and its religious resolution.' When he comes to Vinoba Bhave, he is hypercritical without no rhyme and reason. Rest of the India and the world took him as Saint and Great soul. Bhave, a supporter and follower of the Mahatma, took an active part in the upliftment of distressed India. He started the '*Bhoodan Andolan*' land charity revolution and motivated many people for giving away their land to the poor and the needy. As Naipaul is hyper-motivated to find faults, he heavily criticizes Bhave and uses many derogatory epithets, which are no worth mentioning here. He quotes The Time magazine and tells the readers that fifteen years ago Bhave came on the cover of The Time magazine with the title 'I have come to loot you with love.' As far as the magazine is concerned it, once, criticized Dr. Manmohan Singh, the former prime minister and renowned economist in the world, by labeling him an 'underachiever'. It also criticized prime minister Narendra Modi with the caption 'divider-in-chief' on the front cover. Therefore, such criticisms bear no value and show only the malice and prejudiced tendencies of the magazine owners and the editors. People love to read controversial material and there is a potential market for it by publishing such news, circulation increases, and people get entertainment but when the controversy takes place editors also publish their apology note.

It is strange enough that he finds intellectual properties almost zero in India. Dr. Radha Krishnan, renowned philosopher and the former President, has been extolled and praised highly by the west itself, Baba Saheb Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian constitution, Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, etc. were the great intellectuals, who made their mark on the world stage. Dr. Ambedkar's autobiography *Waiting for the Visa* is in the syllabus of American universities, Radha Krishnan's *Indian philosophy* and Jawahar Lal Nehru's "The discovery of India", etc. are among the best pieces of literature in the world. But despite all the facts Naipaul deems India, 'Devoid of Intellectual property.'

"The Election in Ajmer" is an essay cum reportage and catches glimpses of the election. By the way, elections are a normal phenomenon in the whole world and a normal process in democratic countries. But the elections in India are different things. When elections begin in India, there arises a natural curiosity, who will win the election? Which party will get the majority? Who will be the CM or PM? And so on. In the voting process, the voter plays a vital role. The essay highlights the political tussle between the uncle and the nephew, who represent the new and the old congress respectively. Here Naipaul records each and every detail of the events that occur in Ajmer – the murder of the maharaja, schism between families over politics, the influence of the princely states over the people and the political maneuvering of the leaders. As the essays progress Naipaul sheds light on the character of the political parties. He describes Jan Sangh, a party, which rallies Hindus against Muslims, and Hindi speaking north against the Dravidian south. The writer writes though it declared communism its enemy but its communal strength remained its strength. Orthodox Hindu opinion has occupied a little space in the pages as well. This orthodox community completely rejects the western system and its culture. For their development, they solely rely on the ancient system of India. He quotes Mr. Sharda:

We don't want to take ideas from Russia and Kosygin. We have a heritage, a culture. We have the Vedas, the first book of the human race. With the Vedas' light other people have developed their cultures." Here in this statement Mr. Sharda echoes Swami Dayanand Saraswati, who proclaimed to back to the Vedas if India wants to progress. (p.52)

Finally, the nephew wins the election, and the old order crumbles. So, the election paves way for the Indira congress and despite all the ups and downs she manages to win the election. Though the parties win the elections, the relations never remain the same. Such is the negative impact of party politics in India.

The essay, "Looking and not seeing: the Indian way" begins with a personal description of his family. The opening line indicates that he wants to free himself of every kind of criticism when it comes to India. He brutally criticized India in his travelogues that his books were banned and he was also criticized. Many people reacted and wrote articles about his perspective and their perspective. But all of them admitted that whatever he painted in his books about India and Indian culture was more exaggerated than reality. If conditions had been so bad here, why would anybody around the world come here? That means it was Naipaul's own perception. What he wished and expected India failed to produce, therefore he became

harsh about the land of his ancestors. The opening paragraph sets the tone of the essay that it was all about perception and the way one sees things.

I have said that I very early became aware of different ways of seeing because I came to the metropolis from very far. Another reason may be that I don't, properly speaking, have a past that is available to me, a past I can enter into and consider; and I grieve for that lack. (p.81)

As far as the current essay is concerned, the Images of India that he has depicted in the essay is not his creation. In fact, he has taken characters from the Indian background and has tried to share their perspective about India and when he finishes the essay, he shares the experiences of his family. The first one is a mattress-maker, who could not recall India beyond the Railway station and failed to give him understanding about India. The second is Rehman, a man in Surinam whose book *Jeevan Prakash*, presents the account of his Indian heritage and his experience in India. Again, the book fails to convince the writer and leaves no important imprint regarding India. Next, he takes up Mahatma Gandhi, whose long sojourn in South Africa has been discussed through his autobiography and the writer has the strong view that the experiences of South Africa and his three years study of law in England played an important role in Gandhi's life. According to Naipaul he had not read anything about England. Naipaul quotes Gandhi Ji's own words "to read anything not a school book". Naipaul writes, 'he had never read a newspaper. He had no idea of the history of India.' Even whatever knowledge he had about his own religion, came to him, what he saw in his family and listening to readings of *Ramayana*. Such a description about Mahatma Gandhi sounds like Kabir's exposition about his educational background- "I neither touched a piece of paper or ink or pen" whatever he learnt was through observation and listening. So, at this stage the same case is with Gandhi ji.

He had drawn from many sources, some of them very strange – not only Ruskin and Tolstoy and Thoreau, but also his mother's rustic religious ideas, the no breakfast association of Manchester, and the South African jail idea. (p.109)

The next great person, who he discusses, is Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru. He was also the product of the west. He also went to England and studied law and became a barrister. Twenty years younger to Gandhi. Initially, Nehru thought of Gandhi as a distant and unpolitical, who was not interested in the congress or Indian politics. Gandhi was a sort of an enigma to him but as the understanding developed, he became his protégé and the ardent follower.

Through Rahman, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nehru, Naipaul up to some extent, asserts the contribution of the west behind their success. Rahman, Muslim by religion, could not make it possible in British India, being the tutor of Brahmins and pundits and his teaching of *The Ramayana* because he could face objections on his endeavor if he stayed and did it in India. But outer world Surinam gave him the opportunity to make the impossible into possible. Gandhi and Nehru both got their best exposure through western education and political ideas and made great contributions to their country.

The last of his India essays, "India again: the Mahatma and After" exhibits his changing perspective about India and the people, who got reverence for their contribution towards India. He discusses the lives of three men namely – first, Mahatma Gandhi Second,

Vinoba Bhave and Third Nirad C. Chaudhuri.

Mahatma Gandhi needs no formal introduction, Vinoba Bhave was the pioneer of the Bhoodan Andolan and Nirad Chaudhuri, CBE. Among his essays, these three figures appear twice: first in *Looking and Not seeing: the Indian way* and second time in *India again: the mahatma and after*. The nature of both essays are quite similar. In the first essay, he has discussed the life of Mahatma from his biography and Nehru's perspective. Vinoba Bhave and Chaudhuri got a scanty place but mentioning them there did not invite favorable criticism from his pen. In this essay which is the topic of the current pages, he discusses the life of Vinoba Bhave and Chaudhuri and partly mentions the life of Mahatma. Coincidentally, both essays have been written between the same years. When he wrote the first essay, it seems that he was not satisfied with the ideas therefore he decided to write the second one so that he might fulfill his desire to backlash the cultural and intellectual properties of India and to establish that "India has no mean of judging. India is hard and materialist. What it knows best about Indian writers and the books are their advances and their prizes...The most important judgments of an Indian book to be imported" (p.142).

As per Naipaul's opinion, Gandhi was wise enough. His leaving of South Africa and arriving in India happened at a feasible time. Whatever he could have done in Africa, he did and reached the saturation point over there. Obviously, South Africa was not his native land, therefore, everything could have been done there up to a limit. When he sensed that his work is over and now nothing is left there to be done. He headed to India because there was enough room for him. Hind Swaraj (Indian Home Rule) was nonsense and anti-modern and since the time was opportune there, he could get away with it. According to Naipaul, the book failed to attract the reader even today scholars do not consider it worth reading. The remaining part of the essay is not actually the criticism, it is completely bullying. Naipaul spared Gandhi just by criticising him because Gandhi is not a man of ordinary stature. He is the cultural symbol therefore, Naipaul avoided brutal criticising of Gandhi. Whatever material he took up for his criticism, was partly from his autobiography or from the foreign archives and the book on the life of Mahatma Gandhi. But Vinoba Bhave and Nirad Chaudhuri were not so fortunate and insulated from the poisonous arrows of criticism. They were not alive today to read the bullying details about them otherwise they could have filed a lawsuit of defamation against Naipaul. He brings heavy bullying against both of them and rejects their scholarship outrightly. He depicts Vinoba Bhave just as the 'latrine cleaner' and Chaudhuri self-proclaimed scholar, who did not know even the meaning of scholarly. To sum up we can say that Naipaul's criticism up to some extent could be taken into the right perspective where he is highlighting the genuine problem of the system, they can be taken as feedback to improve the policies of the country but his critique on Vinoba Bhave and Nirad Chaudhuri is completely motiveless malignity, which is beyond the comprehension. Though Vinoba Bhave was criticised by the political parties in India for a dint of political reasons Naipaul's criticism is not political, he just wants to criticise both Bhave and Chaudhuri to hit India and her intellectualism. Therefore, in all of his essays except the election in Ajmer, he could not free himself from the biasness and prejudices against India. One way or the other he wants to solidify his 'dark perspective' against India.

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