

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2017.2.5.76>

Naipaul: Craving to Revive 'The Sense of Glory Dead'

Amit Tewari

Research Scholar,
Department of English and MEL,
University of Allahabad

Prof. Deepika Srivastava

Senior Professor and Ex-Head,
Department of English and MEL,
University of Allahabad

Abstract

V.S. Naipaul's obsession with the past is present there since his writing of *An Area of Darkness*, though it remained highly unnoticed among his remarks on Indian squatters. In *A Million Mutinies Now*, this obsession becomes obvious to those who are still prepared to listen to him. Though his writing is largely about dystopian situations, the reason that he is able to see this draught is because he has a picture of Ramrajya or Indian utopia in his mind. He wants the ancient idea to be revived with such originality that everyone regardless of his high or low origin is given a chance to live his life with a proper dignity. This research paper inquires these unrevealed aspects of Naipaul.

Keywords- *Hindutva, Marxists, ancient idea, isolation*

V.S. Naipaul has a sympathy for the historical structures that were destroyed during foreign invasions. He cannot easily forget the pain that was inflicted on the faith of the country by these invaders. He is constantly in search of the remains of the past, and this quest takes him to various places such as Bihar and Vijayanagar. In his edited writings, he is cautious not to seem too much traditional, but his interviews suggest more about his inner self which is still sensitive to ancient ideas. What he says about Ayodhya cannot be negated by any seeker of truth. The fact that Babur was an invader and not a messenger of peace is evident. But nobody except Naipaul has the courage to speak about it. Attempts to convert numerous temples into mosques were not only made in India, but also in other places such as Turkey and Santa Sophia according to Naipaul:

Naipaul: Craving to Revive 'The Sense of Glory Dead'

By

Amit Tewari & Prof. Deepika Srivastava

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved

The people who say that there was no temple there are missing the point. Babar had contempt for the country he had conquered. And his building of that mosque was an act of contempt for the country. In Turkey they turned the church of Santa Sophia into a mosque. In Nicosia, churches were converted into mosques too...these things have happened before and elsewhere. In Ayodhya the construction of a mosque on a spot regarded as sacred by the conquered population was meant as an insult. It was meant as an insult to an ancient idea, the idea of Rama which was two or three thousand years old. (Naipaul to Padgaonkar) Credit: From The Times of India, 23 January 1998.

Predictably, Naipaul's remark shocked many in India, especially the Marxists and he was hailed as a supporter of 'Hindutva'. "I cannot get involved in that" he remarked with a 'dismissive gesture' to L.K. Sharma, but he elaborated on his earlier remarks, in a general way. For him, development is not only about achieving economic goals. It also involves growth of the cultural aspect of a person when his basic requirements are met:

Development is not something that you talk about. It affects everything. It does not occur in isolation. When people begin to have more food and more security, they begin to have a greater sense of themselves. (Sharma 19)

Earlier, in *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, Naipaul has expressed similar views while tracing the genesis of the Dalit Panther movement that had been a protest movement in the Maharashtra in the 1970's and is now confined to the literature produced by Dalit writers. Income and fulfilment of the basic needs are the factors that contribute to the rise of revolutions is one of the motifs of the writer throughout *A Million Mutinies Now*. In his words:

...A certain amount of money had come to the people known as harijans, a certain amount of education, and with that there had also come the group sense and political consciousness. They had ceased to be abstractions. They had begun to do things for themselves. They had become stressing their particularity, just as better off groups in India stressed their particularities. (Naipaul 4)

Naipaul considered Namdev Dhasal, the founder of the Dalit Panthers and appreciated the originality in his writings. "Namdev's great originality was that he had written naturally, using words and expressions that Dalits and no one else used. In his first book of poems he had written specifically in the language of Bombay brothel area" (Naipaul 96). In the course of his conversations with Naipaul, Dhasal's differences with Dalits because of his Marxist leanings, become clear to the reader.

Though Naipaul claims not to take any political stand, yet he meets key-members of various regional political parties such as Shiv Sena and DMK. Perhaps he wants to avoid a

Naipaul: Craving to Revive 'The Sense of Glory Dead'

By

Amit Tewari & Prof. Deepika Srivastava

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved

centrally guided narrative of India and not political parties. Naipaul's assessment of the Shiv Sena is relatively more comprehensive. He is full of admiration for Shiv Sena because of its attempts to make reforms at the grass root level such as in the cramped chawls of Bombay. He met a few Shiv Sena activists, some of whom had been associated with the movement from its inception. One of them, Mr. Raote, told him about the first meeting of the Shiv Sena, deemed to be a youth organization when it was founded. In Raote's words:

The first meeting lasted about half an hour. It was in the main room of their (Bal Thackeray's) small house. Their father occupied that room, being an old man. He wrote everything on a Marathi typewriter. It is still there in the house as a memorial of him. It was Bal Thackeray's father who gave the name 'Shiv Sena'. Shiva's army. It just seemed natural and right. And we pledged ourselves at that meeting to fight injustices to the sons of the soil. (Naipaul 44)

For Naipaul, organizations like the Shiv Sena are inevitable in the present Indian context. It is one of the many 'mutinies' referred to in the title. Naipaul did not get unduly perturbed by it. For him the rise of a revolution from within a revolution was a normal phenomenon. Whenever he hears about a movement or a revolution, the optimist in him finds a new lease of life. He sees these revolutions in various parts of India as gradually contributing towards the country's growth. What was true of Bombay was true of other parts of India as well: of the state of Andhra, of Tamil Nadu, Assam, the Punjab. Though he realized that movements like the Shiv Sena and Dravid Munetra Kazgam belong to the middle class or according to the theory of Naipaul, they have risen in the present in status comfortable enough to support a movement.

The Shiv Sena is a middle class movement and not that of downtrodden people. It is part of a larger self- making process. This process will take a long time. In India, you will have to live with movements like that for the next 100 years. (Sharma 19)

These movements, of the middle class as well as the underprivileged people, in the aftermath of Muslim and later British rule, have been instrumental in shaping the new India, essentially Hindu, according to Naipaul. When he visited Goa, he realized that the imperial venturing of the Portuguese and the British only helped in uniting an India that was essentially Hindu. Even after so much persuasions and executions, the Christian missionaries of Portugal could not succeed in converting the entire population of Goa to Christianity. Naipaul's statement clearly is brimming with hope and in his Indian Trilogy, there are abundant remarks that reveal the thought hidden in the core of his heart:

Through all the twists and turns of history, through all the imperial venturing in this part of the world, which the Portuguese arrival in India portended, and

Naipaul: Craving to Revive 'The Sense of Glory Dead'

By

Amit Tewari & Prof. Deepika Srivastava

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved

finally through the unlikely British pressure in India, a Hindu India had grown again, more complete and unified than any India in the past. (Naipaul 143)

These remarks can be taken as a kind of approval for India's present that has not completely forsaken the past and is assimilating modern scientific growth with culture. Indian culture is not as fragile as it seems in the West Indies. In India, there are various memorials of the rich cultural and religious heritage that keep on nourishing the roots of faith. According to Naipaul, the popularity of the serials based on Indian epics such as Ramayana and the Mahabharata demonstrated that people are still passionate about religion.

He is satisfied with the re-emergence of the Hindu India, a place that he lost in Trinidad. He is also confident that this India is going to last forever. This idea is also a stable cure for his neurosis. His following statement that it is very hard to go back does not mean that he does not want to go back to the past. In fact, this conflict between 'universal civilization' and the 'sense of glory dead' is one of the major themes of his writing:

We all live in a universal civilization, some more than the others. We have our individual particularities. But we are all inhabited by a universal civilization. It is very hard to go back. (Sharma 19)

Socio-political movements interested Naipaul during his recent visits to India, but he was attracted by other aspects of Indian life as well. During his tours in India Naipaul kept on visiting institutions that he saw as a hope of revival. In *Area of Darknes* she visited institutions such as the Theosophical Society and The Aurobindo Society and was disappointed at their indifference and stagnation at a time when the country was at war with China. This time he visited Shantiniketan, the university established by Rabindranath Tagore near Calcutta. His impressions of the place were as such:

I thought of it as a poet-educationist version of Gandhi's Phoenix Farm in South Africa...Something Arcadian and very fragile, depending upon a suspension of disbelief and criticism, and something which ...I thought had faded away. (Naipaul 284)

These remarks are not much encouraging and it seems that he was once again disappointed at his visit, but did not express his thoughts as explicitly this time. He has learnt to mumble the truth. When the picture that he confronts does not match the ideal picture of his mind, he is disappointed. Inside his heart, he carries the Gandhian idea of ideal India and is not prepared to compromise with that idea and image. He is miles and generations away from the India of his imagination and his international setting adds impediments to his stream of Indian thoughts, still from time to time he keeps on thinking about India, and this is his stupendous achievement. Unlike many other residing Indian writers of international reputation, he is not guided by any political intentions but by a pure desire of revival of the past.

Naipaul: Craving to Revive 'The Sense of Glory Dead'

By

Amit Tewari & Prof. Deepika Srivastava

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved

From the above discussion, it is evident that deep inside, Naipaul has a heart that throbs in harmony with the Indian tune. Though he is enraged to see the forces of modernisation rapidly overtaking tradition, he is consoled to see the glorious past reasserting itself, even in the form of mutinies. He is ever ready to meet the revolutionary groups that talk about the betterment of the common people though like George Orwell, he is well aware of the fact that it is extremely difficult to change the fate of humanity altogether. After meeting the Naxalite Dipankar, he is reminded of Turgenev's novel *Virgin Soil*, a work that expresses a similar idea, disapproving mutinies and revolutions. In fact, after getting to know about Naxalism, he himself writes two novels expressing the boredom of the Naxalite life and the futility of it.

Works Cited

- Naipaul, V.S. "Interview: History is Not a Matter of Licking Wounds." *The Sunday Times of India* 5 December 1993.
- . "Interview: Dileep Padgaonkar." *Times of India* 23 January 1998.
- . *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. London: Picador, 1990.
- . *India: A Wounded Civilization*. London: Picador, 1977.
- . *India: An Area of Darkness*. London: Picador, 1964.

Naipaul: Craving to Revive 'The Sense of Glory Dead'

By

Amit Tewari & Prof. Deepika Srivastava