



HIERARCHY IN POWER IN THE HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION: A CRITIQUE OF V.S. NAIPAUL'S TRAVELOGUE, INDIA A WOUNDED CIVILIZATION

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Abstract

A close analysis of Naipaul's travelogue depicts the truth that his works are an attempt to understand his own past, to come to terms with it and to some extent, at least, to silence and mitigate his nagging awareness of not being too close to India but also not too far from her. Therefore, Naipaul is a merciless provocateur and somewhat narcissistic writer who constantly challenges the received wisdom of time in dealing with the predicament of the colonial and postcolonial situations and he continues to surprise, excite, provoke and even hurt his readers, especially Indians, at every turn of his literary voyage across this country.

Keywords: V.S. Naipaul, Travelogues on India.

Introduction

Mr. V.S. Naipaul, born in Trinidad (an island in West Indies just off the northeastern coast of Venezuela), has a distinctive and conspicuous position in the galaxy of the Diaspora writers. With a literary career of spanning half a century and more than 30 genre-defying books to his credit, Naipaul's entire contribution to literature is a spiraling either around the expatriate themes or his first hand encounters and experiences on his ancestral land India since both are central to his thinking process and creative effusion. Having a terrifying passion for truth, even if it is sour, Naipaul exposes the wounds on the minds and hearts of the colonized people who are beyond all hopes of healing or redress. No doubt, Naipaul is a writer with Eurocentric sensibility

and so he is defiant in his observations and assertions but he spares none and so has become notorious for his views on the postcolonial situations, socio-cultural aspects and development prospects of the culture and civilizations of the Third World nations in general and India in particular.

Study of the book: India A Wounded Civilization

Naipaul continues his assault on India in the second book of his acclaimed Indian trilogy and, like the first one, *Wounded* is also a travelogue written during his visit to India in 1975 and now the writer seems to have acknowledged the dignity of exposing the maladies of his country with little humility. When Naipaul had first visited India he was very provocative in his assertions and so all the Indians were deeply hurt and humiliated. Actually on the very first visit his disillusionment with his ancestral land was quite bewildering and, so he could really not rise above the filth, poverty, and unhygienic life of Indians. But in this book Naipaul starts observing Indian culture, religion, the political system and though he is very critical yet considers and speaks of the real challenges faced by India before and after independence in a more convincing way.

Here also Naipaul is quite critical of Gandhi and his ideological views that have been otherwise acknowledged the world over for their power to sustain humanity. Naipaul criticizes the simplicity preached by Mahatma because he thinks that Gandhian philosophy finds solace in poverty, **"Mr. Nehru had once observed that a**

danger in India was that poverty might be deified. Gandhianism had that effect. The Mahatma's simplicity had approved to make poverty holy, the basis of all truth, and a unique Indian possession. And so, for twenty years after independence, it had more or less remained" (*wounded*, 38). To him it is surprising that Gandhian India had been very swiftly created in just eleven years, between Gandhi civil movement in 1919 and his Salt March in 1930. Naipaul writes,

"Gandhi had given India a new idea of itself, and also given the world a new idea of India. In those eleven years nonviolence had been made to appear an ancient, many-sided Indian truth, an eternal source of Hindu action. Now of Gandhianism there remained only the emblems and the energy; and the enemy had turned malignant. India needed a new code, but it had none. There were no longer any rules; and India so often invaded, conquered, plundered, with a quarter of its population always in the serfdom of untouchability, people without a country, only with masters was discovering again that it was cruel and horribly violent"(*wounded*, 16).

Naipaul found the Hindu religion solely responsible for such inhuman discrimination and exploitation of the greater part of the society and so he is very critical of Hindu belief system,

"Hinduism hasn't been good enough for the millions. It has exposed us to thousand years of defeat and stagnation. It has given men no idea of a contact with other men, no idea of the state. It has enslaved one quarter of the population and always left the whole fragmented and vulnerable." (*Wounded*, 43).

To the ancient Aryans the untouchables were 'walking carrion'; Gandhi - like other reformers before him sought to make them part of holy Hindu system. He called them *Harijans*, children of God. A remarkable linguistic coincidence: they have remained God's chillum. It is ironical that independence. The antique violence remained: rural untouchability as serfdom, maintained by terror and sometimes by deliberate starvation.

Naipaul does not hesitate in criticizing the Gandhian principles of semi-religious nature of his politics. His skepticism is so rude that he dares to question and even disapprove Gandhi's

mahatmahood. Naipaul's is very vindictive in saying;

Gandhi himself (like Tolstoy, his early inspiration) declines into a long and ever more private mahatmahood. The obsessions were Tolstoy an-sexual anxieties in old age, after forty years of abstinence. This period of decline was the period of his greatest fame; so that even while he lived, 'he became his competitive piety. Knowledge of man as a man was lost; mahatmahood submerged all the ambiguities and the political creativity of his early years, the modernity (in India) of so much of his thought. He was claimed in the end by old India, that very India whose political deficiencies he had seen so clearly, with his South African eye. (*Wounded*, 141)

Naipaul says that, no doubt, Gandhi swept through India but he left it without an all accepted ideology and so his worshippers have become vain and ineffective after him. For additional verification, Naipaul turns to the memoirs of Mahatma Gandhi. As a young man, Gandhi was possessed with the idea of moving to Britain to study the law. Against the odds, he succeeded in this task and records his maritime trip to the imperial centre and his studies in the approach to the bar. Yet, as Naipaul observes, Gandhi seems to notice nothing going on around him and this continues when he is elsewhere and his focus is almost entirely internal. Gandhi is also experiencing his being but he does not notice as important those events occurring outside of him when there is so much going on inside his consciousness. Major Indian religions and philosophies emphasize the importance of cultivating the inner being after all. In this context he says that even their greatest social reformer, the father of nation Mahatma Gandhi failed to teach them lesson of brotherhood, self-reliance and hard work. Even the food habits of the Indian people horrified Naipaul and he could not bear the very idea of serving food to animals on the same plate in which people themselves eat. He writes with full belief that Indian society is wholly diseased and irreparable as sanitation was linked to caste, caste to callousness, inefficiency and a hopelessly divided country, division to weakness, weakness to foreign rule. Speaking about the Gandhi's views of universal brotherhood Naipaul says that no one of purely Indian sensibility could have seen so clearly and so Gandhi emerged as a

colonial blend of the East and West, Hindu and Christian. The spirit of service, excrement, bread labor, the dignity of scavenging, and excrement again Gandhi's obsessions even when we resolve non-violence, when we set aside all that he sought to make of himself, and concentrate on his analysis of India seem ill-assorted and sometimes unpleasant.

About Gandhi, the Mahatma, Naipaul writes that when Gandhi returns to India for good, in his mid – forties, he is fully made; and even at the end, when he is politically isolated and almost all holy man, the pattern of his foreign-created mahatmahood holds. In the turmoil of independence the killings, the mass migration between India and Pakistan, the war in Kashmir he is still obsessed with the idea of self control and abstinence.

Moreover, to Naipaul the *Ram raj* that Gandhi offered is no longer simply independence. India without the British; it is people's government, the re-establishment of the ancient Indian village republic, a turning away from the secretariats of Delhi and the state capitals. But he opines that this is saying nothing; this is to leave India where it is. What looks like a political program is only glamour and religious excitation. People's government and the idea of the ancient village republic are not the same thing.

Old India has its special cruelties; not all the people are people. Even if Gandhi took India out of one kind of *Kal Yug*, one kind of Black Age; his success inevitably pushed it back into another. The difficult lessons of South Africa were simplified and simplified in India: ending as a holy man's fad doing the latrine-cleaning work of untouchables, seen only as an exercise in humility, ending as a holy man's plea for brotherhood and love, ending as nothing (*wounded*,143).

Therefore, even the Moslems fell away from Gandhi due to his Hindu ways of Mahatmahood and they turned to their own Moslem leaders, preaching the theory of two nations on religious line. In 1947 the country was partitioned, and many millions were killed and many more millions expelled from their ancestral land; as great a holocaust as that caused by Nazi Germany. And in 1948 Gandhi was killed by a Hindu for having undermined and betrayed Hindu India. To Naipaul it is irony upon that Gandhi's mahatmahood in the end had worked against his Indian cause.

Naipaul reiterates that Bhave and so many other Gandhians still do propagate what Gandhi had said many years ago, **“Our first step will be to get Gram-Raj (Government by the village): then lawsuits and disputes will be judges and settled within the village. Next it will be Ram Raj (the Kingdom of God): then there will no longer be any lawsuits or disputes, and we shall all live as one family.’ Bhave said that more than twenty years ago and something like that is being said others today, in the more desperate circumstances of the emergency”** (*Wounded*, 145). Therefore, by a life of strenuous parody Bhave has swallowed his master and in his parody all the human complexity of the mahatma has been dimmed into mere holiness. Thus the Gandhian ideal is the withering away of the state.” **Independent India, Gandhianism is like the solace still of a conquered people, to whom the state has historically been alien, controlled by others.** (*Wounded*,145).

After independence India faced many challenges. The average Indian was very little equipped to cope up with these challenges. Naipaul says, India – for the first time in the history – was starting to realize its own fragile state. The Hindu world, he says, shatters as soon as it tries to expand. He chose multiple Indian novels to make his argument and he partially succeeds in this attempt, especially when he precisely exposes Indian attitudes of worldly defeat. Naipaul says, this characteristic Indian attitude caused the death of this great civilization.

Being an ancient civilization, India should have advanced quickly. But instead it become more and more archaic. The reason, Naipaul believes, lies in the subtle effects of constant invasions for past thousand years. He says the whole creative side of India has died because of this conquering. The effects are evident in Indian paintings, cinema, music, and architecture. With each one of this art forms, Naipaul says, the tradition has been broken. He believes this creative loss has gone unnoticed for generations.

The real India remains so little known to Indians, he says. People lack the ability of social inquiry. The habits of analysis are foreign to this land. And because of this lack of observation, Indians don't have any ideas, instead they have obsessions. And these obsessive lives act like a collective amnesia blurring the past quickly. The

intellectual second-rateness caused by the Indian attitudes make India more crippled and India has so little to offer to the world. He says, the self-absorption – the retreat of Hindu mind – causes an enormous defect of vision, which further hinders the development process. Naipaul believes that, for too long Indians – as conquered people – have been intellectually parasitic on other civilizations. He questions the contribution of the Indian scientist to the world in the past thousand years. Again, he attributes these failures to the excessive religious influences.

Naipaul attributes the lack of intellectual growth to the underdeveloped ego of Indians. The underdeveloped ego, he says, has permeated through the entire social organization. It pushes Indians away from individuality and makes them less adventurous. And as a result deprives them of possible excellence in any field of study.

With this newly given freedom if India has to survive, Naipaul believes, it needs to break away from its old patterns. The turbulence in India didn't come from invasions, but it generated from within. And India can not afford to respond in an old way. Naipaul warns that the old Hindu retreat will make India more archaic. Naipaul believes that the borrowed institutions from the western world, like judicial system and constitution in general, will not be able to succeed because of the fundamental flaws in the civilizations. India needs institutions that are based on its own value system, and these systems need to evolve gradually towards more relevant modern world systems.

Naipaul comes to assess that no government can survive on Gandhian fantasy; and the spirituality, the solace of a conquered people, which Gandhi turned into a form of national assertion, has soured more obviously into the nihilism that it always was. He further says that the stability of Gandhian India was an illusion and India will not be stable again for a long time. The crisis of India is neither political nor 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”** (*Wounded*, 161).

Outcome from the study

A close analysis of Naipaul's Indian travelogues depicts the truth that these works are his attempt to understand his own past, to come to terms with it and to some extent, at least, to silence and

mitigate his nagging awareness of not being too close to India but also not too far from her. For instance, at the initial stage of his career he made England his self-proclaimed home but in the recent years of the 21st century one could spot this literary giant in tweeds enjoying a quick drink with his Pakistani new wife Nadira in the bar of a Delhi hotel very often – India has emerged as his second home. Though Naipaul's intellectual bent is towards the western habits of thought, yet he could not throw away the baggage of his past and his literary works have the involvement of the Indian people whether he deals with the Trinidadian society or the Indian one.

Naipaul and all such audaciously critical writers must learn the cardinal truth that no spiky provocation of criticism can ever falsify Gandhian philosophy of the life and the world. Whatever the profile of Naipaul as a writer, he remains an affected person possessing the pride and prejudices of a spoiled intellectual of the modern times who is not spiritually enlightened enough to reckon the human values of Gandhian philosophy and, so only forms misconceptions about the great soul and his visionary ideas. Mahatma Gandhi was a legendary thinker and a saint beyond any dispute and Naipaul's ridiculous observations and open criticism of Gandhiji in his trilogy of Indian travelogues have harmed not to the saint but to his narcissistic writer himself who has faced the condemnation the world over.

REFERENCE

1. V.S NAIPAUL, *INDIA: A WOUNDED CIVILIZATION*, (FIRST PUBLISHED BY ANDRE DEUTSCH IN 1977). LONDON: PICADOR-AN IMPRINT OF PAN MACMILLAN LTD., 2002. (ALL THE QUOTES IN THE ARTICLE REFERRED AS WOUNDED AND FOLLOWED BY PAGE NUMBER(S) ARE FROM THIS EDITION OF THE TRAVELOGUE).