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NAIPAUL AS A CRITIC OF TRADITION, RATIONALITY AND MYTH REFLECTED IN
NAIPAUL'S INDIAN TRILOGY

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Abstract

Nobel Laureate Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was born in a Hindi speaking area of Trinidad, in 1932. He was the descendent of indentured labourer shipped from India. A spirit of comedy can be seen in his early works which are set mostly in Port of Spain in Trinidad. When he ran out of fictional material, he shifted to travelogues on India and Islamic countries. He visited India a number of times and penned down his observations in his trilogy on India. His trilogy can be considered as an enquiry into the history of India. It was his own quest of identity which dragged him towards his roots of his origin. He experienced and remarked his understanding of Indian traditions and myths. His third visit after twenty years focuses on India's growth and development and ideological changes. He mentioned various alteration and situational necessity to adapt rationality in the contemporary era. He was considered to be an outspoken writer. He unsympathetically portrayed the third world, digging the unspoken history. Naipaul is considered as post colonial and modern writer, he has written about slavery, revolution, corrupt politicians, the poor and the oppressed and their rage so deeply rooted in the society.

Keywords: Indian tradition, religion, myth, transcendentalism, strategic essentialism, ideology, hybridity.

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The old eternal India bore many ruptures by the Islamic and British invasion. India like a picaresque hero, lost and alienated, yearned to restore its identity. India absorbed the pain as well as the ideologies of the colonizers. Naipaul acted as a critic and allegorized the miseries of the country in his trilogy on India. His trilogy portrays the transformation and emancipation of the people. When Naipaul emerged in India for the first time, he had his set of ideas by which he was brought up.

The Trinidadian society was restrained within a set boundary of Indian traditions and ideas. So, with his eye of a westerner he could only see the obvious. He was more into finding the traditions, its obsolescence and only observed the physical reality. It can be considered as a superficial overview of reality rather than a keen observation. Therefore, his first book *An Area of Darkness* brought various negative connotations. His second book *India: A Wounded Civilization* tried to reason how India acquired its fragmented state because of its

passivity. At his third visit after two decades, India had an Industrial impact on the society. He interrogated a lot many people, tried to connect with their core emotions and feelings and delivered an optimistic piece to his ending trilogy.

The eternal India rests in its old equilibrium. Naipaul points out the Indian passivity in his book *India: A Wounded Civilization*. Conquests and defilement are accepted as normality with time. He gave various illustrations to prove his point. Vijaynagar which is a magnificent capital city of hindu Kingdom, was conquered and destroyed by 'Moslem principalities.' The destruction is now forgotten, the city is "peasant wilderness with scattered remnants of stone and brick structures." Among the stones there exist a surviving temple, pilgrims visit neglecting the ruins. The university students of Bangalore might have not even heard of it. Naipaul also mentions the magic with idols which await in the artist's shop to bestow life into it. It acquires life by chanting and writing 'twelve letter mantra' fifty million times.

'India will go on' (Naipaul 9) whatever the uncertainties arise, India will stick to its latent belief system. Strategic essentialism is a concept by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in which the suppressed group intentionally takes on the stereotype about itself and then in acts the strategic resistance against systematic power by inverting the power dynamic within it. India took up the ideologies and remains stagnant to the revolt. The fragmentation is now the new normalcy.

The Gandhian belief of non- violence instituted by the karma and dharma- the two Hindu calm. This calm prolonged in the works of R. K. Narayan. India in itself is dynamic within itself. It cannot be bounded by unhampered smallness. The 'Strategic Essentialism' fails when Indians are resistant to act. The strategy goes half achieved. "We lived within our lesser world; and we cannot even pretend it was whole because we have forgotten that it had been shattered." (Naipaul 11)

We have learned to live within the idea of subjection. The sophistication of Narayan's India somehow veiled the cruel reality. To illustrate the non-doing, Naipaul gives example of Srinivas the

protagonist of *Mr. Sampath* who is an idler, lived in his family estate and does not care for his wife and son. His venture of publishing a journal and screenplay gone flop and the idea was soon forgotten. His life and the world around him passed without any bothering. Naipaul labels Narayan's works as a "religious' fable' which depicts only the righteousness. India will go on but not on the path of creating 'Individualism' but will slip and rest under the shade of ignorance, which is one of the traits of the advanced age.

The advent of modernism can be considered as bliss or it is a curse? Naipaul expresses the modern attitudes of Indian way of life, counting the economic growth and emancipation of the people of the modern age from the colonial era. The leading mutinies of the people have a corner for insecurities. German Marxist Philosopher and cultural critic, Theodor Adorno and Horkheimer's book *Dialect of Enlightenment* opens with a grim assessment of the modern culture.

"Enlightenment understood in the widest sense as the advancement of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as master. Yet the whole enlightenment earth radiates under the sign of disaster triumphant."

The emerging revolutions in the travelogues were on the basis of religion, caste, race, and economic disparity. Identities discussed in *India: A Million Mutinies Now* like Papu, Mr. Patil, Anwar, Mr. Raote; all have their own orbit of struggle and solace. Mr. Raote had always had courage and confidence, the gift of religion, the atma-vishwas of which Mr. Patil of Thane had spoken. Anwar finds brotherhood in his religion. Therefore religion and cultural values has an edge of new aged ideas. The mutinies pursue an interim escape from the ongoing revolutions, transcendentalism provide absolute emancipation.

Papu, a Jain stock broker who lived in dread of revolution and anarchy. His vegetarianism was in threat, vegetarianism can be understood as a refusal to be impurity, for him it was something one could anchor oneself to values. In the drastically changing world, if the nature of trading changed he would

have to fight or give up as he being a Jain could not adopt the aggressiveness the industrialists were adopting. He could not get involved into murders and dreadful crimes like buildings construction business involve. He was sure about the revolution which is about to happen which resembles the revolution of Independence.

“It made the Independence struggle seem like an interim. Independence had come to India like a kind of revolution; now there many revolutions within that revolution.” (Naipaul 7)

The Emancipation of the people with the progress of modern science and industry does not promise to liberate people from ignorance, brutality and fear.

India evolved from a stagnant colonized country to a radically updating cosmopolitan. The constant upgrading conformity of the community, religion and commercialization lead to the degradation of values and dominance of social norms and fashion. The only escape from the claustrophobic modernity is acceptance of grounded knowledge i.e. transcendentalism. The view transcendentalist affirms is confidence in the validity of a mode of knowledge that is grounded in the feelings and intuition. The ethics of individual that stresses on self-trust, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency is a turn away from modern society.

Naipaul's trilogy deals with a number of generated myths and ideologies. A myth is a hereditary story of an ancient origin which was once believed to be true by a particular culture group; where as an ideology, in a complex way is the product of the position and interest of a particular class. However the concepts are wrongly ingrained into the society. India has a very rich heritage and has given birth to so many great religions. India before the invasions was unaffected by the tyranny of colonialism. The colonial invasions affected the civilization deeply. The mythology shall be considered as a formation of pre-colonial era. As the country undergoes divisions into communities and caste, it produced Ideologies and its further displacements. Ideology can be considered as a strike out of myth, in the contemporary era.

An excerpt from the *Gita's* preaching says: “And do thy duty, even if be humble rather than another's, even if it is great. To die in one's duty is life: to live another's is death.” Naipaul's work illustrates the ill application of this idea. He illustrated as: The clerk will not bring you a glass of water even if one faints. The architecture student will consider it a degradation to make drawings to be a mere draughtsman. The caste system of the old, eternal India was pragmatic but with the function of the society it decayed. Today's caste distinction causes inferiority, conflict and distrust. Things tend to change with time but this change has taken a detrimental turn and is degrading our rich culture.

According to philosopher Adorno and Horkheimer- “Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology.” Despite myths are outmoded by the forces of secularization, older rituals, religion or philosophies may have contributed to the process of enlightenment and may still have worthwhile to contribute. The ideologies are displacing the older concepts. This is the determined path of the demythologization by the emerging ideologies. The civilization needs to be selective and wise, brushing the existing overused and no more required things will not hurt. In order to constitute the totality we need to adapt the healthy environment.

The idea of development arose after the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Education and ambition took momentum and everyone wanted to have a shadow of employment. Naipaul shares Pravas's voice who is an engineer from the east of the country. He was from a priestly family. His grandfather was a priest of the royal family. The society faced transitions from a 'half ritualistic family' to a 'no ritualistic family'.

“My Grandfather was a good classical ritualistic purohit... whereas with my father, if you want to trace the transition, the mantras were chanted out of familiarity, reverence, a way of expressing your gratitude to God... I make no difference between that and the young man today in a video or audio surrounding the chants, formally and informally, Hindi film songs.”(Naipaul 190)

In the old eternal society there was distinction of food intake. "Hinduism is a trinity based religion- there are three options for everything. So, food was of three kind Sattvik, rajasik, tamasik" (Naipaul 193) There was a logic in the Indian mythology. Sattvik food is very light and mind oriented. Brahmins used to intake it. Rajasik was work oriented, tamasik food had some mixed qualities of both. In the emerging world setting we can witness a shift in culture. Ritualism for the new generation is a show-act with complex mantras and with less shadow of employment. Pravas says, although he knows more recent trends, and he can articulate western rituals in a better way yet he cannot say that he knows more than his grandfather.

Caste and religion seems good when there is no distinction and suppression among the classes. Castes were created to divide the work of the society. It wasn't inherited with birth but with adapted profession. This resulted in communal disharmony. Naipaul brings up 'cultural impoverishment' in limelight with the narrations of Sadanand Menon. His father was a small businessman. They belonged to lower caste. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Brahmins became dominant. Periyar Thidal brought 'Self Respect Movement' a movement of cultural correctness by the suppressed class to enact revolt by not accepting the existing class norms. It was a clash between the Aryans and the Dravidians. The Dravidians were the "militant class. They called themselves kshatriyas, the warriors of the Tamil hierarchical order." Sadanand couldn't understand that why was his teacher so prejudiced against him? He took it for granted first, later got to know how the priest at the temple used to condemn him. He became rationalist, stopped going to temples and didn't perform any rituals at his mother's death. He was against the superstition which the Aryans brought. He says:

"The Tamil civilization of ours is a very old one. Say, about 5000 years old... What happened at that this foreign civilization came from the north, and they started differentiating among classes. Every century since then there has been a protest by some Tamil intellectuals against the caste system.

These intellectuals have always in different degrees been resisting rituals and superstition. But they didn't decry the entire system. They said that religion was necessary and God was necessary. But the Aryans were introducing superstitions." (Naipaul, 270)

Conclusion

There is no absolute totality. It can be achieved only in a utopian world. Absolute peace and freedom do not exist. India is beautifully adorned by its diversities. The Islamic and British invasions weakened and exploited our civilization. The Pre-colonial period had its own internal conflicts. Culture had its own drawbacks like caste distinction, patriarchy, polygamy etc. India earlier was beautifully flawed while the post colonial period brought tyranny.

Despite of the various wounds, India is prospering. It has an absorbing power like grass. In the poem, *Grass* written by an American poet Carl Sandberg. The grass or nature has a forfeiting power. Sandberg quotes "Shovel them under and let me work- I am the grass; I cover all."

Identity is not an innocent term, it incorporates culture, ethnicity, nation and politics etc. It attaches desire to get recognized, attracting the western lifestyle. Our ideology has recognized it as epitome. Identity creates a clash between our culture and our surroundings. One can neither fully abandon his or her culture nor adopt the alluring Western Culture, which belong to the future as much as it belong to the past, it is not something which already exists. India surpassed the existed colonial dogma by absorbing the reigning ideologies of the contemporary era. The alluring power of the colonizers fascinated the Indian minds and they mime to improve.

Therefore, India is undergoing constant transformations. Our identity is fluid and it has a hybridity. Mimicry is seen as an opportunistic pattern of behavior, which one hopes to access to the power, one copies. Their existing cultural identity got suppressed by the dominant foreign culture. The complex and resultant modernity subsists hybridity. The subordinated culture and

ethnicity produces hybrid identities, which has its own merits and demerits.

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