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REPRESENTATION OF CULTURE IN THE SELECTED WORKS OF V.S.NAIPAUL

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ABSTRACT

V.S.Naipaul is one of the greatest Caribbean writers of Indian origin, writing in English. As a novelist he is an international figure and exceptional. He is fond of travelling and has been keen observer of the different cultures and geographical situations. His writing reflects various aspects and any particular culture including social, political, religious and personal belief systems. He has experimented with travelogue writing and chosen it as a best suitable form to satisfy his quest of creative writing. Travelogue is a work of art like any other form of literature, genre of historically realistic fictional work, more than a tourist guide or a report and is certainly more than a graphic record of the places and personal impressions of the sojourner. Travel literature displays local colours, climates and culture. It has almost assumed a metaphysical and semi-religious significance. I have selected two novels of Naipaul to explore the cultural aspects of Islam in Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia. These two novels are; Among the Believers and Beyond Belief

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V. S. Naipaul: As Person

The nature of the pattern of a travelogue is determined by the personality of the writer. V.S. Naipaul is a zealous traveller, like Hakluyt, Marco Polo, Darwin, Defoe and so many other sailors and sojourners; he has travelled far and wide. His travel writing exhibits various aspects in the light of history, ethnography, sociology, aggression, concern for weak, sympathy for sufferers and his grand evaluation of men, manners, objects and development of a country. He has been one of the greatest Caribbean writers of Indian origin, writing in English. As a novelist he is an international figure and exceptional.

Vidyadhar Suraj Prasad Naipaul was born in 1932 in an Indian Brahmin family at Chaguanas. His father See Prasad was a journalist (1945-1985) and his mother a housewife. Naipaul completed his education at Queens Royal College, Port of Spain Trinidad. Naipaul then went to England on a scholarship. He graduated from Oxford University. He married Patricia Hale, his classmate in 1955 and settled down in Wiltshire, England and the marriage survived for 41 years till Patricia died of cancer in 1996 and he married Nadira Khanum Alvi the same year a former Pakistani journalist.

V. S. Naipaul: Travelogues

V.S. Naipaul's fiction and non-fiction deal with the themes of fragmentation, social order and sense of the world. His books are difficult to understand not because they are thought provoking and too real but as

T.S. Eliot says "Human beings cannot face much reality". (Frank 107) Naipaul's travelogues are masterpieces because they are his very personal response to the problems of Third World countries. His travel writing is not only intellectual adventure but they are also human documents. The countries he has visited became a new foundation of gratuity. Journey's to Trinidad, Islamic countries, India and South America opened up a new source of experience and observations. All his travelogues have been a travel made out of curiosity and interest to understand the Third World countries. The contrast between the sophisticated westernized selves and the Third world countries has made him travel far and wide.

"Home Keeping youths have ever homely wits. I would rather entreat thy company to see wonders of the world abroad than, living dully sluggardized at home, wear out thy youth with shapeless idleness" (Shakespeare 71)

Travelogue: The Theory

Travelogue is a work of art like any other form of literature, genre of historically realistic fictional work, more than a tourist guide or a report and is certainly more than a graphic record of the places and personal impressions of the sojourner. Travel literature displays local colours, climates and culture. It has almost assumed a metaphysical and semi-religious significance. Elizabeth Waterson says that "a travelogue is a diary and narrative of travel, sport and adventure". It is, she states, "a blend of description, anecdote and personal commentary" (Waterson 10).

A travel book records the things, objects and views seen heard and observed, it is the registration of the physical, emotional and intellectual reactions of the traveler. The mode of narration of the varied themes and connections in between shows its relativity to the world of fiction. On this account Herman Keyserling says that: "Travel writing must be read as novels, since the characteristic features of travelogues are not different from fiction" (Gussow 22).

Writers like Wickramagamage and Dissayanke have analyzed travel writing in various modes which the travel writers have been using since times bygone. Both the writers have exemplified such approach of writing in various ways, they are as follows:

1. Information Oriented travelogues contains more of mineralogical, botanical and ethnographic details. The authorial voice is minimized supposedly and the landscape, its description and documentation are fore-grounded.
2. Experiential sentimentalizing, deals with emotional sentiment and involvement where the writer goes into personal and emotional displays, and there is an emphasis on adventure and drama. American captivity narratives during 17th and 19th centuries were of such a type.
3. Intellectual analytic is the most subjective of the travel modes as well as most controversial. Dissayanke and Wickramagamage state that this is the form of writing where the narrative emerges as a kind of intellectual social commentator. V.S. Naipaul would fall in this category, though there are abundant overlapping instances of the other two types.

After World War II most of the colonies achieved independence and tourism flourished in the colonies and travelogues became a blend of history, ethnography, anthropology or sociology and autobiography. The journey from post-colonial to metropolitan centers and the turmoil of the soul of an expatriate creating diaspora acquires a significant place in Naipaul's travel writings. These facets lead to an unstable literary genre in which the author shifts from one facet to another. In Naipaul's various visits to different countries this shifting of the facets springs up. Of this D.J. Enright has said that "travel writing is a genre of mobility, whereas ethnography has traditionally tilted towards stasis" (Gussow 76). Rob Nixon says about today's travel writings that:

"Any one facet can dominate at any specific point. A travelogue, therefore, can be like a chameleon, changing colours all the time it can have anthropological analysis, or it can also be a song of the self" (Nixon 22)

V. S. Naipaul: Islamic Journeys

After discussing theoretical aspects of travelogues, persona of V.S. Naipaul and his literary works, this paper will now focus on the Islamic visits made by him to all the four non-Arab countries which have been done in two books *Among the Believers* and *Beyond Belief*.

Iran

His main aim to visit the non-Arab countries was to see Islam in action and to find out the application of Islam on every segment of the society. The first country which Naipaul paid visit to was Iran, during the month of Ramzan. It was the day for election of an assembly of experts who would work out an Islamic constitution called *Iraday* or *Aabath*.

At the very outset however Naipaul realizes that "the dream of the society purely ruled by faith . . . that dream of the society of believers excluded me." (7) In Iran Naipaul saw an atmosphere which was not fully religious. He came across people who were disillusioned and frustrated due to the change of government which had taken place under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. The ouster of the Shah led to bloodshed leaving behind wounded populace and Tehran city shattered and torn by violence. The symbols of ongoing revolution were visible everywhere. Naipaul was bothered by the fact that the Ayatollah was using prayers as a demonstration of revolutionary unity. The use of prayers was not for religious purpose but for political occasion, Naipaul writes:

That Ayatollah at the microphone asked for chants from the seated multitude. And again and again the responses came, drowning the amplifications from the loudspeakers. The chants were about unity. Unity, union, facelessness, in an immense human coagulation (72).

Facelessness of common man was becoming the motif of Islam. Individualism was being surrendered to Ayatollah Khomeini. The way the whole atmosphere was described by Naipaul it seems that Khomeini had become the political God of Iran. The revolution going on seemed to be on superficial level, no change could be imagined. Only the autocratic rule seemed to change and because of which two separate groups were divided the Leftist inspired by Lenin and Stalin and Revolutionary guards inspired by religious fanaticism of Khomeini. In this conflict between the two groups, the Revolutionary guards had the edge adopting violent and militant tactics in their thirst for power. In this revolt the leftist *Journal Ayandegan* was closed, history was tampered with and poets were also not spared. In the name of Islam many Muslim clergies' were enhancing their position. People who supported the revolution suffered from the anxiety of where things were heading.

In the sequel book *Beyond Belief*, Naipaul again travels to Iran this time not as an enquirer but as a finder of stories. His theme is centralized among the 'converts' as he calls them because according to him all those people not living in Arab are all converts. He believes that Islam originally came from Arab, it is a matter of conscience and private belief and anybody else than an Arab cannot be a Muslim. Naipaul says:

"Islam in its origin is an Arab religion. Everyone not an Arab who is a Muslim is a convert. Islam is not simply a matter of conscience or private belief. It makes imperial demands. A convert's world view alters. His holy places are in Arab Lands; his sacred language is Arabic. His idea of history alters. He rejects his own; he becomes, whether he likes it or not, a part of the Arab story. The convert has to turn away from everything that is his. The disturbance for societies is immense, and even after a thousand years can remain unresolved; the turning away has to be done again and again. People develop fantasies about whom and what they are; and in the Islam of converted countries there is an element of neurosis and nihilism" (Naipaul 1)

This type of statement has led to a lot of controversy in the Muslim world, they have been highly critical about Naipaul's thinking on Islam as Amin Malak has said:

"Naipaul never pauses to reflect upon the simple fact that all existing religions must have founded, at their inception, on a conversion from one system of belief towards another, and all that initial adherents to any new religion are converts. So, why Muslims alone are accorded this dubious description?" (Malak 1)

Since the Islamic revolution in 1979 nothing happened for the development of the country, education, health care, social services and rights to women listed in the negative parts of the revolution. The middle class people were highly affected. Millions left the country due to rage against the privileges or the repression imposed by the clerics. They took away the capital and skill both. The endless eight years war between Iraq and Iran led to a wounded Iran. The war Naipaul says "was the inescapable theme" (22).

Many people like Mehrdad, Arash, Ali and many others were disillusioned and so many young people had died in the war that there was nobody left for marriage. Whoever was left was in great pain. People were suffering and were scared as to what will happen if they sneeze also. Melancholy had taken over. It was just a political upheaval which led to personal development of Ayatollah Khomeini and not the people. All these stories, Naipaul connotes to various pain, persistent fear, and betrayal of innocent life which inflicts Iran, the consequences of martyrdom in warfare the impossibility of finding consolation. "All that could be said was that country had been given an almost universal of pain. Implicit is the pain and cannot be recovered" (38).

Pakistan

After travelling to Iran Naipaul went further to Pakistan which was built with the very idea of making a pure Islamic state, a place where Indian Muslims could live in purity. Sir Mohammad Iqbal (1876-1938), a revered poet and an orator, in 1930 in a speech to The All Indian Muslim League came up with the idea of creating a separate state. He said "In an undivided India Islam will be in danger, will go the way of Christianity in Europe and cease to be itself". (102). But creation of Pakistan led to the uprooting and killing of millions. Nyla Ali Khan has tried to portray about the time of partition and what effect it led to has been really atrocious:

"The aftermath of this historical catastrophe was a traumatic dislocation of agrarian society in the villages as well as of the population of urban areas, (Who) one day woke to find they no longer inhabited familiar homes but that most modern thing, a Hindu or a Muslim nation" (Khan 32)

Naipaul compared Pakistan and Iran and found similarity on one aspect only and that is they are same kind of believers. Faith has not wavered in both the countries. The Mullahs have a political control over each and everything. Economically Pakistan was in a shattered state but as far as the faith was concerned nothing else could heed it. If for the women it was crisis for womanhood then for men it was hammering on their logical being. The Ahmadi's and the Muslims of India called Muhajir's were not well treated and for that matter anybody living in Pakistan searched for an outlet not from their homes but from Pakistan itself, as it was not safe for President itself, as has been mentioned by Naipaul the killing of President Bhutto:

"In the jail in Lahore I had been told they had put him in a cell where the cruel summer sun fell for much of the day. . . He washed his own clothes, the man who had been dandy. At every state of his legal degradation the quality of his food declined" (109)

He came back to Pakistan sixteen years later through his book *Beyond Belief* where he is was not endorsing any development but was again discussing the stories of people who have been fragmented and shattered by being in any part of Pakistan. Pakistan was built due to the insecurity as they lost power and position, it may have been regeneration of Hindus but for Muslims it was not easy and all this happened due to British rule. Naipaul says that where India grew with leaps and bound Pakistan proclaimed only faith. Naipaul says:

"The British period two hundred years in some, places, less than a hundred in others was a time of Hindu regeneration. The Hindus, especially in Bengal, welcomed the new learning of Europe and the institutions the British brought. The Muslims, wounded by their loss of power, and out of old religious scruples, stood aside. It was beginning of the intellectual distance between the two communities" (89)

Naipaul is of the view that the idea of new state was accompanied by the old idea of glory, invasion and conquest. The Muslim converts had a sort of neurosis and in this fantasy they forgot who they are and became violators. The "shaky identity" was the concept of nationhood but there was only "triumph of faith" without democratic institutions or a "modern economy" depending on United States. Islamic identity relied on faith; Islamic law on intimidation and suppression. Naipaul tells about the various stories of people who accepted

Islam and Pakistan but are victimized by the injustice of the political and social structures that control their lives. They waver between commitment and doubt ever warding psychic chaos. Naipaul told tales about every strata of the society be it rich, poor or middle class. The story of the poor uneducated woman suffering the travails of life, awful incidents in the lives Rana, Sohail and Salman who was a mohajir, all of them were crushed somewhere due to political stunts or by the interference of faith. Their predicament was told by Naipaul like this:

“There are two kinds of people who are living well in Pakistan people with names and people with money. Everybody else is like insects, worms. They have no power. No approach, powers are in limited hands, and money is also in limited hands” (280)

Naipaul says that decades of internal strife in Pakistan due to politics, financial let down, corruption illiteracy and widespread poverty indicates that Pakistan has not reached a unified national goal or idea of nationhood.

Indonesia and Malaysia

The last two destinations where Naipaul went in search of Muslim institution were Indonesia and Malaysia. These two nations are places of multiculturalism. Islam did not spread over here through force but by trade and also by the messengers sent by the Muslim heads of India and Pakistan. In both the travelogues Naipaul has also emphasised about the influence of the western culture in both the countries which came along with the British. During the British rule cheap Indian and Chinese labourers were brought to these countries and over the years these outsiders have established themselves more than the natives of the respective countries. The Malays and Indonesians adopted Islam leading to internal several ethnic divide, disturbances and unrest, as there were few people who did not want to adopt that Islam and many were there who could not have patience for other religion. In spite of the serious religious differences, both the countries managed respectable overall development. Although Naipaul believes that the adopted religion could not provide peace of mind and soul to the Malays or Indonesians.

Conclusion

During his travel to these four countries in two journeys Naipaul has given his analysis and justification to what he has seen and understood, albeit many other writers and critics do not find it very suitable. Suman Gupta says:

“An analysis of Islam is conducted in *Among the Believers* in searching the manner of a person who is ignorant to its nuances, unacquainted with the language of the people, who wishes to record and assess only what he sees and hears. From this he reaches certain damning conclusions about the political aspiration dogmatism and authoritarianism of proponents of Islam in the modern world. Beyond the Belief a follow up for the most part finds his analysis and expectations confirmed. His analysis of Islam is more in line with modes of cultural evaluation he had evolved in other social usually colonial/post-colonial contexts” (Gupta 76)

The critic's opined that analysis and justification of V.S. Naipaul are mere generalizations, based on pre-conceived notions and biases and lack substantial ground. They also point out that mere observations and documentations of few stories do not necessarily give the insights into the theology, history, politics and sociology of Islam. Naipaul through his experience shared his thoughts and brought to the fore many aspects of Islam which remains hidden in the labyrinth and mirage of humanity and to some extent many of us approve his thoughts as traveler. Actual conclusion on the writings depends a great deal on the reader or people living or travelled to these countries.

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