



Exploring V.S. Naipaul's Ambivalence Towards India In *An Area Of Darkness*

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Abstract

Postcolonialism is the academic examination of the cultural, political, and economic legacy of colonialism and imperialism focusing on the exploitation and control of colonized people and their lands. Numerous authors of post-colonial literature have made an effort to define their identities and present an argument in a new setting. V.S.Naipaul as a postcolonial writer, reflects India's culture, history, and ethnicity in his writings with different dimensions. It will be argued through an examination of his book *An Area of Darkness* that his worldview affects his strenuous relationship with his experiences abroad; how feelings of affection and enjoyment compete with colonial eagerness and blindness. Naipaul's approach towards India was deeply colonial in his work, *An Area of Darkness* which is the first part of his trilogy on India. Fundamentally, the postcolonial writings of V.S.Naipaul unfold a sense of understanding postcolonialism which can be easily identified in his prolific writing of literature. The paper will explore postcolonial features like ambivalence, marginalization, identity, multiculturalism, racial discrimination, hybridity, mimicry.

Keywords: Ambivalence, Postcolonial, India, Hybridity, Multiculturalism, Mimicry, Postcolonial Identity.

Introduction

Postcolonialism is an academic field that examines and responds to the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism. It opens one of the most important powers in human history by showing how local communities were impacted by colonial rules in various parts of the world. Conversely, the primary themes of postcolonial literature distinguish between the experience of migration and exile and the legacy and experience of colonialism. Migrant postcolonial writing has been made possible by the multicultural mixtures brought about by various intercontinental movements in a world that is becoming more and more globalized and migratory. According to postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, multiculturalism led to a drastic shift in the colonized people's sense of self, resulting in ambivalence, otherness, fragmentation, hybridity, and mimicry. In this sense, the English nation's dominance as the

colonizer extended throughout both the colonial and postcolonial eras. In this way, the conflicts between the former colonized and the former colonizer could still be identified even after the colonies ruled by England gained their independence.

As a writer from the postcolonial era, V.S. Naipaul illustrates how colonialism continues to have an impact on the people who have been colonized. V.S. Naipaul, the Nobel laureate, wrote many novels and an equal number of nonfiction books that chronicled the movements of people, the fall of the British Empire, the paradoxes of exile, and the conflict between belief and disbelief. He realizes that colonized societies suffer from lack of cultural, historical, and racial homogeneity.

When Naipaul considers India as a 'nation' from the viewpoint of an emigrant it calls into question the identity of India that is beyond national borders. An immigrant's viewpoint contributes to expanding the theoretical framework used to identify India. In his widely read 'Indian trilogy' Naipaul offers a critical assessment of Indian politics, culture, and history. These volumes take the reader on a journey to India, which is described as 'an area of darkness' and has lost its culture and morals to a place that is described as 'a wounded civilization' where Naipaul eventually finds the scene of 'a million mutinies.' The books *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977) and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990) by V S Naipaul describe his outlook about India through colonial perspectives.

In *An Area of Darkness* his entire discourse about India is colonial. The work most likely expresses a young man's intense resentment for his ambivalent nation, which he failed to comprehend is that a country's history spans thousands of years and fifteen years is an insignificant period in that history. Despite the fact that *An Area of Darkness* was written in 1964 it contains colonial viewpoints. In this work, Naipaul comes across as conceited, apprehensive, careless in criticizing India.

Ambivalence towards India in V.S.Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness*

Naipaul has travelled and stayed in India for a considerably longer period of time. However, the accounts of his initial visit given in *An Area of Darkness* seem to be journalistic in nature and to be immature in several aspects of observation. For the first time Naipaul travels to India with the stated goal of learning more about his Indian identity. A writer's ability to create a unique identity has always been important, particularly if he is an outsider. This makes valuable mark on his writing leading to ambivalence. *An Area of Darkness* delves into the territory that occupied his conscious thought. For Naipaul India was a fantastical place that provided all the answers to his questions about identity and origins.

Despite being of Indian descent Naipaul conducted himself like a European when interacting with the Indians. He browsed through a British outfit. Any foreigner visiting India want a unique identity in order to avoid becoming one of the millions of tourists. Thus, Naipaul began searching for independent treatment as soon as he arrived. It's likely that he wanted to criticize the East in general and India in particular in order strengthen his newly earned respect in the West. Despite his Indian ancestry, he never felt like he belonged in the Indian community. So he writes:

In India I had so far felt myself a visitor. Its size, its temperatures, its crowds: I had prepared myself for these, but in its very extremes the country was alien. Looking for the familiar, I had again, in spite of myself, become an islander: . . . (AAD 140)

Expanding on the topic of sanitation, Naipaul believes that Gandhi with his astute 'Western eye' was the only one who was able to recognize the problems with the caste structure and made an effort to elevate work. Naipaul exaggerates when he claims that the solution to the sanitation problem lies in the West's straightforward, uncomplicated viewpoint. Gandhi spent twenty years in South Africa before returning to India at the age of forty-six, therefore Naipaul believes that Gandhi had a unique perspective on India that no other Indian could match. Gandhi became a colonial amalgamation of the West and the East, of Christians and Hindus, 'Naipaul tries to identify with Gandhi where he says, He sees exactly what the visitor sees'. Writing about Naipaul's conscious identification with Gandhi, Chandra Chatterjee writes: "Naipaul feels that native Indians cannot see their country with clarity of vision as Gandhi could because they ignore the obvious".

The travelogue *An Area of Darkness* tells the story of a traveller who is plagued by a persistent sensation of rootedness. The India he travels to is not his India. Because of some imported notions of indentured servants living far from India. To a foreigner however the India that Naipaul visits is the actual one is full with ambivalences. Naipaul has admitted it more clearly: "It was the country from which my grandfather came, a country out in the void beyond the dot of Trinidad, a country never physically described and therefore never real" (*AAD*, 21). Naipaul expresses his desire to comprehend India, a challenging nation for him. He understands that India is not his home, but he also does not want to be just another tourist traveling for sightseeing. So for expressing his sentiments of ambivalence Naipaul writes:

India is for me a difficult country. It isn't my home and cannot be my home, and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it; I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close, too far. (*AWC* 10)

An Area of Darkness ends in ambivalence. Naipaul faces a dual challenge in it: establishing a perspective to understand India's meaning and unravelling the process to unravel its meaning. Considering the book's harsh reflection on India, Naipaul discovers a part of Indian sensibility that he finds impossible to comprehend. The area of light is the area of his "experience, in time and place." (Naipaul, 1964,30) In his own words, Naipaul has acknowledged that he has struggled to articulate his brief comprehension of the philosophy that forms the foundation of India. He says: "I felt it as something true which I could never adequately express and never seize again." (Naipaul, 1964, 266) The book explores Naipaul's difficult relationship with India, resulting in confusion and ambiguities.

In *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul reinforces his fixation on the idea that Indians lack a sense of history and they cling to myths and fatalism about their magnificent past in order to improve their perception of themselves. The notion that his nation was better than all others before the British arrived is lived by postcolonial Indians. The largest disadvantage for Indians is their inability to learn from the country's history of conquests and invasions which restricts their understanding of their identity. Naipaul comments, "It is a history whose only lesson is that life goes on. There is only a series of beginnings, no final creation". (*AAD* 216)

Naipaul observes that colonizers' presence may be felt in all aspects of society, notwithstanding their physical absence. The author observes that British influence can be seen in architecture, attire, and language. He views the hybridization of England and India as a 'violation', deeming the mix of clothing and Indian attempts to adopt English languages as 'ridiculous'. Naipaul focuses on architecture when discussing the British influence on India. He describes British architecture in India as an 'incongruous imposition'. He writes, "this is one aspect of Indian England, it belonged to the history of India; it was dead". (*AAD* 202)

Conclusion

V S Naipaul holds a unique position among post-independence travellers to India due to his intriguing love-hate relationship with the nation. It is an odd situation, mostly a tension arising from Naipaul's wish to stay independent of the dominant culture of the nation visited. As a result, he writes extremely delicate, impressionistic, unpredictable, and emotional travelogues. Although there is a great desire in Naipaul to say something dramatic that would appeal to the reader in the West, there is some truth to this statement. In the context of the 1960s, his opinion on job reservations was also prejudiced and demonstrated a strong bias that would be unacceptable in the modern era. Naipaul as a postcolonial prophet who foretells and compares the destiny of India to that of Trinidad. They have also authenticated Naipaul as a colonial mimic. The entire encounter appears to be extremely personal, and he acts like a peculiar, dissatisfied and close-lipped foreign-returned man. *An Area of Darkness* captures the entire chaotic range of post-colonial India and expresses Naipaul's keen feeling of disappointment over the post-colonial India. P .C David, an Indian critic, analyzes the work and provides a fascinating read. He opines that, Naipaul begins his voyage from darkness with ambivalence, wanting to experience a romantic India that cannot withstand the light of day.

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