

## A CRITICAL REVIEW OF NAIPAUL'S – AN AREA OF DARKNESS

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### ABSTRACT

An Area of Darkness is the first travelogue that V. S. Naipaul has published, and the objective of this article is to analyse some of the portions of the book that are significantly different from one another. Because of the narrative's representation of the writer's paradoxical connection, which is depicted as being both an "insider" & an "outsider", a harsh commentary on the socio-political life of Indian society is formed. This critique is produced as a result of the narrative's depiction of the writer's connection. During his trip to India in 1962, he discovers that the enchanted paradise that he had imagined when he was a little boy is not at all what he had anticipated seeing there. This is because he is unable to find a solution to the problem, and as a result, he projects onto the screen any bad characteristics that are connected with India. The goal of this research is to examine the critique that is being made on a national level, taking into consideration his views and experiences in India.

**KEY WORDS:** Darkness, Critique, Paradoxical Connection, Indian Society, Naipaul.

### INTRODUCTION

Through the lens of the "ambivalence" that the great majority of readers fail to notice, the purpose of this research is to reconsider the work. This will be accomplished by analysing the travelogue An Area of Darkness, which was written by V. S. Naipaul in 1964. Consequently, it is referred to as a "rereading" due to the fact that the writings of this postcolonial travel writer have already been praised by the academic community that focuses on postcolonial studies. In light of this, it is quite probable that readers would experience a sense of confusion when they come across yet another interpretation of the same. It would be an understatement to say that India is the sole sub-continental island that can be considered a part of the "supposed" homeland of the Indian colonists who settled in the West Indies. It is only possible to regard India to be a part of

the homeland from the perspective of an island. For this reason, the geopolitical history of the Indian subcontinent, both colonial and postcolonial, is of the highest relevance for a colonial Indian like Naipaul who is striving to connect with and grasp his own identity. This is because of the fact that Naipaul is working to understand his own identity.

## DISCUSSION

As stated by Naipaul, his first trip to India occurred in 1962, which indicates that it was just over fifteen years shortly after India had earned its freedom. Be prepared to be astonished and scared, not only by him but additionally by his readers, particularly the Indians, as you go on this journey to the sacred territory of The Ramayana & The Mahabharata, the book he had learnt about when he was a little lad. For the purpose of providing a dramatic illustration of the great distance that colonial characters such as V. S. Naipaul had to travel to reach his “originary” dwelling on the Indian subcontinent as a result of the upsetting and eliminating repercussions of British settlement, the narrative can be determined in a number of different ways. The fact that this is the case provides the sense that it is a dramatic picture of an Indian who has become estranged from his country and is attempting to reconcile with the modern-day counterpart of the long-forgotten “homeland.” At the same time, it seemed that everyone was progressively coming to grips with the painful but necessary reality of the project of “going home” at the same time. Taking this into consideration, the well-known literary critic Suvir Kaul presents the following point of view in his book, which is titled An Pictorial History of Indian Literature and is available in the English language:

“There are burdens Naipaul brought to India when he visited it in 1962; added to them was the special weight of his cultural inheritance, his sense that the “Indian” aspect of his Trinidadian sensibility could be explained, or discovered perhaps in some form of originary plenitude, in the land of his maternal grandfather”.  
(Mehrotra, 2003, 235)

When Naipaul initially arrives in India, the first thing that happens in the book is that he is filled with worry. In spite of the fact that he received his schooling in London, the memories of his boyhood fantasies about the well-known country of India continue to be unpleasant to him. When an expectation is only partially satisfied, it is similar to playing a game of hide-and-seek,

even if it is possible to have feelings of discouragement. The traveller, on the other hand, is caught aback by the unpleasant reality of India in ways that he could not have envisioned taking place. From that point forward, he says:

“But in spite of knowledge, this seemed ordinary and inappropriate! Perhaps all lands of myth were like this: dazzling with light, familiar to drabness, the margins of the sea unremarkably littered, until the moment of departure”. (Naipaul, 1964, 39)

As soon as he gets at his destination, he is immediately overwhelmed with anxiety since he is aware that he would soon be leaving behind not just the beautiful place that he is now in but also his own ignorance. In his statement, Suvir Kaul asserts that:

“The opening sections of *An Area of Darkness* are thus often about the loss of voice and self-possession (including his now famous description of his attempts to rescue two bottles of liquor from the clutches of customs bureaucracy that then administered liquor licenses in a Bombay under prohibition). What follows in the travelogue can be understood, in all its richness of reportage and observation and its failure of spirit and empathy, as Naipaul’s attempts to recover his bearings, to ‘impose’ himself in his surroundings”. (Mehrotra, 2003, 236)

The magnitude of his connection to a nation that had never truly been his, with the exception of the romanticised colonial memories that continued to play a role in his developing sense of identity, was the one that proved to be the most significant. This heightened the already palpable feeling of impending doom that he was experiencing at the time. His nervous collapse, which came as a consequence of his failure to identify himself among the multitudes of Indians in Bombay, showcased the difficulties of adopting this faraway Indian identity. His collapse was a result of his inability to identify himself. Naipaul, along with the Indians, becomes “invisible” as he, along with them, blends in with their “sameness” and their rejection of his difference. Because of this, he loses his visibility and becomes “invisible.” It is likely that this is the very first time that he has ever experienced the sensation that his Indian heritage might limit his ability to be an independent. He takes great note of the following:

“I had been made by Trinidad and England; recognition of my difference was necessary to me, I felt the need to impose myself, and didn’t know how”. (Naipaul, 1964, 39).

In light of this, it would appear that he is searching for “difference” due to the fact that he is interested in the mystery that would accompany his appearance in the “sameness.” When he eventually comes to terms with his Indian identity, the awareness that this is not for him causes the process to take longer than it would have otherwise. He not only delays embracing his Indian identity in favour of everything that is not Indian, but he also delays identifying with his race, religion, and culture in order to say that it is insufficient. He does this in order to satisfy his need to assert that his Indian identity is insufficient. In order to provide an explanation for his conduct, he does this. During the chapter that is labelled “Fantasy and Ruins”, Naipaul’s colonial hybridity exposes more of its frightening imitation. At first glance, it would appear that the colonial-Indian-Hindu identity that Naipaul adopts for himself is not founded on continuity or continuity. A childhood picture of India was something that Naipaul had been working to cultivate, and the reminders of British control in the country “laid bare” the ideal that he had been working to cultivate. It is said by Naipaul that:

“This confirmation (of complete British possession of India) laid bare a small area of self-deception which, below knowledge and self-knowledge, had survived in that part of my mind which held as a possibility of the existence of the white Himalayan cones against a cold blue sky, as in the religious pictures in my grandmother’s house”. (Naipaul, 1964, 199).

Despite the fact that the West Indies were foreign to them, the idea that India was a single entity provided some kind of solace. While he is in India, he comes to the realisation that his earlier conviction in an Indian identity was a fallacy. This realisation occurs while he is feeling a sense of grief. Recording his “Indianness” at this moment is the only way for him to free himself from the responsibility of that history. The disappointment of the colonial traveller appears to be the impetus for Naipaul’s conflict with India or the people of India. In accordance with the well-known critic Suman Gupta:

“In An Area of Darkness Naipaul is concerned primarily with describing the nuances of the unique kind of colonial mimicry he found in India, and with charting its (largely adverse) effects. That is the importance of this book: in his first encounter with India Naipaul doesn’t try to delve into its essentially Indian depths, he is content to examine its peculiar old world variety of colonial mimicry and to observe the effects”. (Gupta, 2010, 80)

As was mentioned in the remark that came before this one, the book includes a substantial amount of critical criticism that is written from the point of view of India. Both the British imperial ambition in India and the Indians who carry on the ambitions of the colonisers are depicted in a negative light by the colonial. Both of these parties are negatively impacted by the colonial. The fundamental truth of his childhood recollections of an Indian communal life in Trinidad is brought into question as a result of the fact that he has been exposed to the viewpoints of American Indians who have just been granted their freedom. While he is making an effort to recollect these memories, he insists on receiving an explanation. No Matter Where You Are:

“Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century, Clifford makes a bold remark when he says: ‘when travel...becomes a kind of norm, dwelling demands explanation’.” (Clifford, 1997, 5)

The prominence of An Area of Darkness may be attributed to the fact that the characters who reside at home, namely those who opt to revert to the pre-colonial era following their liberation from British rule, are seeking a justification. The book An Area documents Naipaul’s harrowing encounter with the aftermath of colonialism, including the conflicting emotions of postcolonial excitement, patriotic fervour, and illusory contentment. This incident is documented in the book. When faced with the remnants of the extensive colonial system, including the bureaucratic structure that was equally oppressive, inefficient, and stifling as the previous caste system, the narrative often explores the intentional eradication of memories of colonial influence by the contemporary inhabitants of India. This is done to protect oneself from the impacts of the colonial system. Naipaul astutely discerns remnants of casteism and Indian enslavement within

the present-day hierarchical bureaucracy. Naipaul is particularly irritated by the presence of British architecture that exhibits remnants of the legendary imperial grandeur, even while there is prevalent poverty, deterioration, and remnants of past royal edifices. Despite his unusual nature, Naipaul nevertheless maintains a sense of ambivalence towards his cultural memory, a noteworthy aspect to highlight:

“I had rejected tradition; yet how can I explain my feeling when I heard that in Bombay they used candles and electric bulbs for the Diwali festival, and not the rustic clay lamps, of immemorial design, which in Trinidad we still used”. (Naipaul, 1964, 31)

Just as it would be erroneous to think that Naipaul considers the Indians completely liberated from their historical baggage, it would also be incorrect to expect a sentimental expression in these remarks. Conversely, he questions the conventionally acknowledged accounts of the colonial and pre-colonial eras that are widely accepted among scholars. Due to their adoption of the impressive magnificence of the British Raj and their claims of reverting to a pre-British era, along with their blatant disregard for the suffering of the untouchables, the disadvantaged, and the impure, Naipaul strongly opposed the majority of the population in India. However, Naipaul has admiration for Gandhi, an Indian individual, due of his distinctive perspective on India. According to Naipaul, Gandhi has the skill of perceiving himself as distinct from his legendary persona. According to him:

“He looked at India as no Indian was able to; his vision was direct, and this directness was, and is, revolutionary. He sees exactly what the visitor sees; he does not ignore the obvious. He sees the beggars and the shameless pundits and the filth of Banaras; he sees the atrocious sanitary habits of doctors, lawyers and journalists. He sees the Indian callousness, the Indian refusal to see. No Indian attitude escapes him, no Indian problem; he looks down to the roots of the static society”. (Naipaul, 1964, 74)

Within the confines of this framework, it is essential to highlight a noteworthy activity that Naipaul took. The lingam of Amarnath Cave, which is a prominent emblem in Indian (Hindu)

mythology, is something that every Indian treasures or remembers, and the reason for this is that they are reluctant to see it while they are in the cave. During a specific time of the year, a large number of Hindus travel to the Kashmiri highlands in order to observe the natural ice formation that represents the phallus (lingam) of Shiva, the Hindu deity who is linked with destruction. Naipaul, with the assistance of his Muslim assistant, Aziz, comes to the realization that he is taking part in that yearly pilgrimage. Naipaul, who appears to be overcome by the physical challenge of entering the cave, makes the decision to forego the opportunity to observe the lingam that is contained within the cave and instead gives this responsibility to Aziz. In a surprising turn of events, Aziz emerges from his hiding place to inform him that he was unable to locate any lingams during that specific year since they were not present. Despite the fact that it is possible to dismiss the absence of the mythical sign as a mere coincidence, what is particularly notable is Naipaul's reluctance to investigate the cave and instead be happy with watching the genesis of the symbol. It is a conscious decision to avoid connection when one chooses to keep myth as a simple legend, as a remnant of something that is absent. A companion pilgrim explains to him, "You do not visit for the lingam, but rather for the essence of the experience" (Naipaul, 1964, 182). This occurs during the event that is being described. This results in a severe and excruciating discomfort. It is his opinion that the process of looking for a sign is not particularly exciting.

In India, Naipaul's identification as both a "westerner" and an "Indian" appears to be causing uncertainty and challenges for him with regard to his identity. According to the critic Chandra Chatterjee, Naipaul's perspectives on India would invariably be impacted by the psychological turmoil that he experiences as a result of his dual roles as an insider and an outsider. The fact that it is necessary for Indians to adopt a European frame of view in order to appreciate their own spirituality is something that he finds extremely frustrating. According to Panwar (2007), 108, Naipaul's wrath and pessimism are a direct result of his innate Western identity, but his happiness and elevation are a direct result of his Brahmin identity. It is possible to make the case that his impression of cultural dislocation is a consequence of the identification that he has made. It is clear that Naipaul's philosophical rejection of Indian patterns of thought and morals is reflected in his dislocation of West Indian and East Indian cultures. At first glance, it appeared as though he was having trouble totally erasing it from his consciousness. There is a

contradiction that arises as a result of the contrast between Naipaul's tendency to take a sarcastic attitude toward the East and his feeling of alienation in the West Indies. When it was first made available, the Indian government immediately put a stop to it.

The Western world heaped praise on it for its forthright and critical viewpoint. At this point, it would appear that both India and the West are misinterpreting it. According to the statement that is printed on the front of the Penguin version, Paul Theroux describes the book as "a masterful work of travel literature... astute and innovative." On the other hand, it is abundantly clear that the book does not belong to the category of travelogues. The assertion that there existed "Darkness, filled with a form of existence that is death, a negation, a distortion, and debasement, from which he is ultimately relieved to be free" was inaccurate as well. This site appears to be the meeting point between a person from within their own nation and a person from outside of their own nation, as stated by Ezekiel (1974, 78).

## CONCLUSION

Naipaul and India engage in a two-way exchange of relationships and encounters. The recording of this action and reaction against a context that is just as complicated as the activity itself looks to be a complicated instance. "Self-deception" is a term that Naipaul has used to describe a little part of his Hindu-Brahmin identity that he believed remained to exist. During his boyhood, he reportedly felt a separation between the outside world and the constrained Hindu milieu of his grandmother's home. This was something that he experienced, according to him. Both of these realms were able to coexist independently while maintaining their mutual secrecy. In a similar manner, Naipaul's identities as an "insider" & an "outsider" diverged and displayed different responses to various sets of circumstances. During the course of *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul would surely be confronted with a twofold battle. Discovering the essence of India and gaining an understanding of its genuine nature looks to be a pursuit that will continue for a long time.

As the narrative comes to a close, a range of feelings are expressed. There was no other possible inference besides that. Naipaul is unable to transcend beyond the segment of India or Indian sensibility that he initially represented, despite the fact that the book contains a number of unfavourable observations. According to him, the bright zone is inhabited by his "experience, in



time and place.” According to Naipaul (1964, 30), despite the fact that he has a basic comprehension of Indian philosophy, he concedes that he is unable to fully articulate it in his own terms. He acknowledged that he had the impression that it was an unquestionable fact that he would never be able to properly describe or convey again. It is necessary to have more context in order to comprehend the meaning of the citation “Naipaul (1964, 266)” because it is not apparent. As a result of the fact that the book and its critics have chronicled a variety of features of India, *An Area of Darkness* is an important resource. No perspective from the Diaspora toward India was ever presented. Right now, there is a highly intense debate going on among opponents over whether or not the viewpoint was accurate regarding India. The presence of a persuasive argument is necessary for us to evaluate Naipaul’s thoughts on India; yet, this argument does not currently exist. The book has a number of instances of ambiguity and contradicting facts as a result of its in-depth investigation of Naipaul’s turbulent connection with India. The writer frequently expresses a great personal connection for India, and this is something that is readily apparent. He is steadfast in his belief that India will never go into decline, and as a result, he continues to make new works about the country, making an effort to study the issues that it faces from a positive lens.

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