

Anarchy and Chaos in V.S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas*

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Abstract: Naipaul presents the anarchy and chaos of African reality in its true colours in *Guerrillas* and *A Bend in the River*. These novels present the barrenness and fluidity that prevailed after the colonial rule is over. There has been interesting parallels between *Guerrillas* and *Water With Berries* by George Lamming. Both novels feature exile of protagonists to London from the Caribbean who gets involved in revolutionary acts and both contain liberal doses of sex and violence. Naipaul's attitude to the rootless expatriates is that they exist in insecurity and envy to one another. Their relations are marked by mistrust and violence. He lays bare the shallowness, the chaos and their lack of loyalty to England despite their eager will to return to England.

Keywords: V.S. Naipaul, expatriate, Guerrillas.

I feel that to destroy the world is the only course of action that is now open to sane men. (Naipaul 1975: 42). These lines very well describe the characteristics of V.S. Naipaul's later fiction. He portrays the social and political tensions inherent in the colonial and post-colonial world. However, Naipaul was not a political writer in his conscious scenes at the onset of his career. One can very well see his shift of focus to the post-imperial Third World political scenario where individuals are representatives of power politics. Naipaul, the Nobel Laureate, himself migrated to England and acquired the British citizenship. So, he enjoys his multiculturalism but wailing the loss of belongingness can also be heard in his writings. George Lamming puts this feelings in these words in *Pleasures of Exile*, "the pleasure and paradox of my own exile is that I belong where I am" (Lamming 1960: 56). Manjit Inder Singh has a point when he says:

Economic power, racial revenge and exploitation of all sorts mark the fate of the hopeless immigrant or expatriate exposed to danger and humiliations at the hands of the new post-colonial powers which bulldoze aliens and outsiders, seeking revenge for their own past operations and brutalization (Singh 2002: 131).

Guerrillas, set in an unnamed Caribbean island, revolves around the action of three major characters – Jimmy, Jane and Roche. This novel shows the bleakness and utter desolate vision of the world. Infact, the landscape of the novel itself throws light on the anarchy of the world. This novel has a sound like Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the people who inhabit in this "Waste Land" are quite in tune with it. They are morally and intellectually barren. Naipaul writes:

The sea smelled of swamp; it barely rippled, had glitter rather than colour; and the heat seemed trapped below the pink haze of bauxite dust from the bauxite loading station. After the market, where refrigerated trailers were unloading; after the rubbish dump burning in the remnant of mangrove swamp... (Naipaul 1975: 09).

Roche, the most honest expatriate feels irritated and says, "I have built my whole life on sand" (30). He is the master on this island and Roche's presence in the island as Jimmy's "master" emphasizes the persistence of colonialism in the era of political independence. Naipaul here shows that the real power still resides outside the island and Roche and Jane, his girl friend are the margins of power here. But, the truth is that even Roche cannot manage the things. This reminds us the lines of Naipaul's another novel *A Bend in the River*, when he writes, "half-made societies that seemed doomed to remain half-made" (Naipaul 2004: 170). In *The Second Coming*, W.B. Yeats also writes:

... the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood- dimed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack the conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity (3-7).

Most of the action of the novel revolves around the characters talking nostalgically of the past. The past from which they want to escape and reject but this is the life line of their destructive present, where the glamour of existence is materialised by the paralysis of fear. So, it is the childhood that offer permanence to them and Naipaul through Roche shows that 'childhood' figures promptly in expatriate talk, he writes, "it was odd here how people spoke about their childhood as of a period only just discovered and understood" (Naipaul 1975: 143). All the characters including Roche repeat at some point in their lives, "It is too late". They are the bunch of white expatriate in former colonies. Jane is also dazzled by the Caribbean Island and she finds herself 'always ready to leave'. She feels, "the nightmare journey and... an unstable dissolving world". A vague "fear" has told her "that the time had come to leave: escape was urgent" (Rai 1992: 111). While describing Jane, Roche says, "she knew only what she was and what she had been born to; to this knowledge she was tethered: it was her stability, enabling her to adventure in security" (Naipaul 1975: 25). Jimmy Ahmed, half-Negro, half-Chinese, lacks an identity. He is returned from London after an involvement in sexual assault is feared by everyone. Government fears him for his "English Glamour" while capitalist fears by his Black Power that can bring revolution in the island. Jimmy is also aware of his power as he asserts, "they've got to support me... because, if I fail hmmm. I'm the only man that stands between them and revolution and they know it now, Massa. That's why I'm the only man they're afraid of" (27). In order to defer the revolution, his power must be channelized. Jimmy leads the slum youth to bring about revolution and Roche is hired by the authority to

supervise this project. In projecting Jimmy, Naipaul's vision is harsher in moral and sexual terms. Jimmy born, "in the back room of a Chinese grocery" (27) is a bastard and a mongrel. He owns a Community Farm which Jane describes as, "Everybody is pretending that something exist that doesn't exist (30). He has been formed as the outsider and the underdog. Infact, he is a modern Heathcliff of *Weathering Heights* taking revenge on the colonial masters. Roche says to Jane, "I don't think it means anything. I don't think Jimmy sees Himself as Heathcliff" (10). Fifty pages later, we notice Jane while describing Jimmy recalls Catherine's tribute to Heathcliff, "Your mother was an Indian Princess and your father was the Emperor of China" (62). Jimmy is the victim of his own shallowness. He imitates the Westerners but wants revenge from them. Everyone on the island is in clash with impersonal sensibility. Jimmy puts it as, "When everyone wants to fight, there's nothing to fight for. Everybody wants to fight his own little war, everybody is a guerrilla" (87). Jane, Roche's girlfriend follows him to the island as she believes him to be an "engaged doer". But, she soon realises that Roche's position in the island is no better than a refugee. This disillusionment with Roche leads her to Jimmy. She confesses that Jimmy possesses her. R.K. Kaul makes a very interesting observation of Jane's character, "While Jane sees through Peter's self-deception she is herself a victim of Jimmy's meretricious charm. This aspect of the situation is presented novelistically" (Kaul 2000: 162). The situation of the island becomes worse because of the murder of Stephen by the police. Jimmy carries the body around the town and violence breaks out. Jimmy gets the shock of his life when people reject him as their leader. He realises that he is a mere play thing in the hand of the radical group. In a letter to Roy he confesses:

The situation is desperate Roy, the people here have been betrayed too often, it's always a case of black faces and white masks, you don't know who your enemy is, the enemy infiltrates your ranks all the time. Massa mister Roche he's very importunate in his inquiries about one of the boy they sent here, Stephen a gang leader from the city . . . but the situation is getting desperate now, in the still of the night I lose my courage, I feel it's a losing battle, they're sending other agents, I don't know how to cope (Naipaul 1975: 86).

Jimmy's character exposes the foils and futility of the Black Power movements in the Caribbean island. Even the police "don't know who they are fighting or what they are fighting for" (185). Every one is a leader yet every one fears to get killed by the authority. This situation reminds the situation of *A Bend in the River* when Naipaul writes:

They are going to kill everybody who can read and write, everybody who ever put on a jacket and tie... They are going to kill all the masters and all the servants... they are going to kill and kill. They say it is the only way, to go back to the beginning before its too late (Naipaul 1980: 291).

And, ultimately it is the American authority that imposes order on them for their bauxite. Here, Naipaul wants to show that in Caribbean society

there is not any authentic source of the authority. As Champa Rao Mohan says, "this is an oft repeated idea in Naipaul's novel. In a picaroon society like the one depicted in the novel, everyone is a guerrilla – "a privateer" – fighting for his own little cause" (Rao 2004: 123). Roche proves to be a very passive character and confesses to Jane, "You must understand I have always accepted authority" (Naipaul 1975: 54). Jimmy though hate colonisers mimics English middle-class suburbia to the extent that seeing his house Jane cries out, "But its like being in England" (24). Jane in her advancement to Jimmy has an intuition that she is playing with fire but she ignores and meets with very tragic end when Bryant slaughters her. She is frequently referred to us as a prostitute. Jimmy calls her 'rotten meat' but her murder can also be seen as a parody of Desdemona's murder by Othello.

Guerrillas and *A Bend in the River* are different from *The Mimic Men* in the sense that *The Mimic Men* leaves the reader with a hope for a fresh beginning but in these novels the writer is nadir of his hopes that "no one will make a fresh start or do anything new" (149). Jimmy knows that down in the city the community has been collapsed and it is "a community without rules" (103). As Jane also remarks, "these homes are concrete shells and would never become a family houses that had been lived in two or three generations" (57). Again I am inclined to quote Rao, "To Naipaul the post-imperial world has no centre. Both the former colonizers as well as the colonised are at the margins of power but each identifies the centre with the other" (Rao 2004: 125). Naipaul argues that on the Ridge – "everyone lived in a state of suppressed hysteria" (108). Infact, the island was "suppressed without rules and the villagers stranded in time, belonging to another era, an era that contained no possibility of a future" (235). In this novel Naipaul takes us back to the era of bad- johnism and the legendary midnight robbers of the carnival season. The people of the society failed to realise the importance of independence and a promise of a new social order. Thus, the futility of the protagonist in *A House for Mr. Biswas* is in contrast to the frenzy and desolation in *Guerrillas*. Meredith concludes the novel by saying, "it is madness [that] keeps the place going". This hysterical judgement must be seen in author's neurotic fear of the society. Anika Lemaire expresses the neurotic fear of Naipaul in this manner:

The experience which is the object of repression is already structured; it has, that is, entered into the circuit of discourse and has already been spoken, or has at least been brought into existence, before being rejected. As the neurotic has passed a judgement of existence on the repressed signification, that signification will always be capable of being re- evoked by analysis and of being re-integrated into the flow of discourse (Lemaire 1977: 228).

Naipaul reserves his bitter attack for Jane when this 'nice' and 'cultured' English woman began to involve herself with black power advocates and work for the liberal causes for the Third World. Through her the writer adds another dimension to the anarchy and chaos of the Caribbean

island. Robert Hemenway opines, “The relationship between Jane and Jimmy becomes an allegory of the way a third world nation conceives of its former colonial masters” (Hemenway 1982: 200). Jane not realising her position in marginal and powerless society becomes the scapegoat for colonialism as her sense of inferiority is not different from the Jimmy's. Jimmy in his “unresolved anger at being black” takes his revenge on Jane, “to substitute a surrogate target for the one that is unattainable, the white male” (Writh-Nesher 1984: 542). Jane also makes a very apt statement to show the utter chaos, “The colonized native male who has been humiliated by colonialism has only one kind of power left – greater physical strength as male to overcome the female” (Writh-Nesher 1984: 542). Sexual violence not only provides a climatic episode to the novel it pervades it. Jane and Jimmy's sexual intercourse is devoid of any tenderness and homosexual relation of Jimmy and Bryant is the expression of the spiritual barrenness. Jimmy and Jane relation is lack of even minimum physical attraction. Jane's view of his home, his shabbiness his gritty floor reflects her disgust and revulsion. Jimmy also doesn't find Jane sexually attractive. His desire for her is undoubtedly his desire for racial revenge through sexual dominance. Ganjewar rightly puts it:

It is passionless and grim the first time and brutally violent purely an act of revenge the second time. This is the climax of the book a gruesome scene of sexual violence followed by murder. Humiliated by his own sexual failure and enraged at Jane's apparent indifference on the first occasion. Jimmy brutally sodomises her while she screams 'take it out', 'take it out' the second time. And then, fulfilling a promise he had made to Bryant, his lover, he offers her up to him as a victim saying: “Bryant, the rat! Kill the rat (Ganjewar 2008: 192).

Infact, 'Desolation' is the keyword in the novel. It occurs, at least sixteen times in the novel. All the characters in the novel feel the desolation in the sense of waste and sterility. Naipaul has aptly chosen the desolated setting of the drought for the story. Even words like 'derelict', 'abandoned', 'empty and emptiness', 'melancholy' and 'lost' or 'loss' also show the anarchy and chaos of the society. Naipaul has used the structure of *Guerrillas* as a powerful tool to convey the pattern of loss or decay that the countries of the Third World are facing. The title of the novel is both ironical and metaphorical. There are no guerrillas in the novel only gangs, as Roche in an unguarded moment comments, “The newspaper, the radio and the television spoke of guerrillas” (32). In *Guerrillas*, the characters have suffered the aftermaths of colonialism. Escape seems to be the crucial factor in the novel. At last, Peter Roche has escaped to England. The murder of Jane remains unnoticed as if she never existed. Jimmy's quest ends in a fiasco. And, finally Meredith, the colonial politician becomes the minister. It only registers the unpredictable and chaotic nature of politics in the Third World. The mood that haunts the novel is of existential despair and existential absurdity and also of anger to live in this meaningless and anarchic world. Here, the Third and the

First world meet deliberately or accidentally to exploit each other and this coming together for mutual gain does not constitute a society but mere anarchy.

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