

Self-Revelation: Crossings and Ethnicity in the Selected Travelogues of V.S. Naipaul

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Abstract: Naipaul's travels mould his displaced self and his desperate morality into an ecstasy. He mystically associates himself with the subjects that belong to his lost inherited past. His archetype feelings towards moral and social relativism explore the dimensions of memory and his conscience's voice. This paper intends to focus on how Naipaul in his travelogues evolves his self and readers' selves through the process of dialogue and perceptual selection and defense. It also discusses how he tries to demystify misrepresentation, prejudices, religious manifestations and orientations in his creative art and in reality.

Keywords: Perception, ethnicity, polarization, religiosity

Naipaul's Psycho-dynamics in the Literary Urge: Naipaul in his travel accounts intends to bring out psychological and literary perspective as regards being homeless due to immigration of inhabitants from their native country, their loss of belongingness not only to the place where they exist as outsiders but also as expatriates in those countries where their ancestors belonged. Their conflicts towards their roots have slipped into oblivion, because their living conditions and environment in their existing inhabited place have acquired the wings of flight from their native tradition, memories, rituals and religion. Naipaul searches for psycho-dynamics that are motivated from perception of the expatriates, immigrants or from the reaction of the natives towards those who migrate abroad. In this context it is apt to understand the manifestation of one's emotional outburst psychologically:

Perception is a psychological process very much related to both sensation and memory that stores lot of information and generates sense of the multitude stimuli or variables that influence our selection of stimuli from the environment and personal factors and characteristics of the perceiver. The intensity of the stimuli decides the selection, contrast and processing as well as the mental set. (Gerow, 159)

Naipaul's travel accounts express his reaction to multitude stimuli that he cherished while on his visit to many areas of the world, and indeed his art and imagination seem to juggle with the perceptual selectivity and the contrasting situations of his personal mental set and characteristics that processed his reasoning and sensibility to derive the reality that has deeply ingrained in the natives of the regions he visited during his conversations with them. Naipaul as a writer, as an outsider and an insider felt that it was his cultural juxtaposition, cultural hybridity and

cultural crossings that made him awakened to regard self-actualization in the different environments. In order to unite one's mind and body with the diverse variables, the perception transcends the experiences obtained through senses; as a result it stimulates consciousness, curiosity and complacency to receive changes both inside and outside the human mind and body towards the given environment. To understand the blending of emotions, reactions, perceptions with self-consciousness, it is described that:

Consciousness arises out of the awareness of the environment and one's own mental processes. It is a state of mind-the active awareness of all thoughts, feelings, memories and perceptions. It is changing, based on personal experiences, continuous i.e. it is apt to refer here William James 'stream of consciousness' and lastly consciousness is selective. (Gerow, 160)

Naipauls' consciousness undergoes through all these stages because his memories when struck with real experiences, his perceptual constancies, depth and motivation gets an outrageous emotional distancing with the illusions that he has in his subconscious mind and in his unconscious behaviour. He sometimes gets so ecstatic, ridiculous, sensitive and cynical in his observations that it appears he has one-sided view, but the re-reading of the text consciously suggests that how the people of different regions, due to imperial designs of colonising the subaltern areas, lost their roots of belongingness; nevertheless their native culture, religion and rituals attached wings of roots in their memories, thoughts, feelings and that same happened with Naipaul too as an expatriate writer of Indian diaspora. Although his writings denote emphasis on certain religious communities, regional inhabitants and community cultures, but simultaneously he portrays their mental process and shift from sensation to perception to memory and back again to selective information and consciousness. Therefore his literary creativity till date leaves immense scope for the scholars to delve into his self-consciousness that perceives lopsided habitants of subaltern regions – South Asians, Africans, Blacks in America and Latin American, who suffered due to deportation, migration and immigration during the colonial and post-colonial period. Naipaul's travel accounts explore dialogically the political and cultural causes and effects of colonialism on the different societies. He opines that it is relevant to understand the categorization of homogeneous groups into different communal and racial segments. He has craftily interpreted and recreated the context and constructions of myths, history, language and landscape which is mostly controlled by imperial discourse. There is no resistance, yet the writer tries to represent the repression, regression and suppression of the oppressed, the colonised and the indigenous people of South American Islands (Caribbean Islands) and South Asian countries since eighteenth century. In this regard the literary urge of a writer like Naipaul assimilates Mikhail Bakhtin's interpretation of the theory of language and consciousness of the writer in his writings. Bhaktin says:

Dialogue is a means for revealing, for bringing to the surface the already-made character of a person; no, in dialogue a person not

only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time that which he is, not only for others but for himself as well. To be means to communicate dialogically. (Childs, 52)

V.S.Naipaul's travelogue do comprise of direct dialogues and conversations with the native inhabitants, but it can be counted as the empirical observations to collect the information, to view the situations and to select those memories as per his level of depth, perception and consciousness and then to transliterate those moments and experiences of his travels into dialogic expression that is revelation of his self introspection, retrospection of past images, illusions and experiences and lastly his observations 'constitute inter-subjectivity (therefore social) and logically precedes subjectivity'(Childs,53), this we can say as how he reaches to his prospective creative flight.

Manifestation of Crossings and Ethnicity: Naipaul's writings portray dichotomies of his self-revelation. In spite of his personal voice and conscious sensitivity towards the natives of his travel stations, his vision presents his sense of 'the otherness' that is the imperial gaze towards the colonised. Second his place of birth and job-place are foreign to his root-native culture therefore his sense of belongingness as expatriate and diasporic writer expresses undertones of impersonal metamorphosis. Thirdly his dialogic literary language discusses aspirations, conflicts and predicaments of the natives who were considered primitive and savage by the European culture, yet his exhaustive study of travel stations implies traditions, assumptions, choices, plans, individuality, illusion and last but not the least contexts and origins of religiosity and rituals among the emigrants (deported and transported natives of South Asia, Caribbean Islands, Africa and Latin Americans to Europe and America or vice versa). A critic writes in context of Naipaul it is hard to understand a Caribbean mind who due to creolization and transculturation got into a state of emotional dissatisfaction:

The Caribbean experience therefore, implies a double diaspora: a migration to the Caribbean from else – where between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, and from the Caribbean to other parts of the globe, beginning in the middle of the twentieth century. (McLeod, 96)

Naipaul's self and his creative process emerge in three dimensional perceptions in response to postcolonial failings that still could not mitigate the inner activity of faith, religion, rituals and taboos of the people constituting the homogeneity or the hegemony of cultural relativism. He discusses the displacement and sublimation which is the outcome of negative and positive emotions. For example he writes about the Negroes of Charleston town in Caribbean islands who had passed through slavery and civil war since 18th century, yet "*the themes of sermon were religion as a binding together of people*". (*Turn of the South*, p.80) He continues to explain that in the American South "*religion is to them a shared emotional experience rather a shared doctrine*" (*Turn of the South*, 232). The singers who connected the audience with the mythical religious values relieved the audience of their demons and they identify

with the struggles, thus making audience human, receptive and loyal. While the same situation does arise for Trinidad Indians, but they valorised their narrow loyalties because of being cut off from their roots. Their religion reduced to rites in order to establish themselves in a materialistic society. Negroes of the Port of Spain or Trinidad or of British Guiana lived in bitterness, wanted to assert dignity due to racialism, but their values became the values of white imperialism which became myths and prejudices among them. Here he means that even after the independence of the commonwealth colonies there prevail cross-cultural complexities and cultural fantasies. Secondly we find Naipaul's sensitivity to the religious and social norms affecting the psychological and physiological variables of different communities:

The West Indies Indian despises the Negro for not being a West Indian, because Indians have taken over all the white prejudices against the Negro. Thus the two races became apart in Trinidad and their antagonism would have reached to peak, had their not the white imperialism ended in West Indies. Again he emphasizes that the world of Indians in Trinidad was taboo-ridden, their own value system, their family organisation that absorbed them through their religious rites and rituals, hence no outsider could penetrate nor the members of the family could escape from the protection of hierarchy or religion. (The Middle Passage, 59)

He further describes that unlike social rivalry between Negroes and whites in Trinidad or British Guiana, there was social complexity among Hindus and Muslims in bonding together due to different values; yet they were non-western type so they mingle with each other in British Guiana, that could be visualised in their architecture built by them in British Guiana. He comments that Indians of Martinique in Caribbean Islands unlike the Indians in British Guiana, Trinidad and Surinam came from South India, a single depressed Hindu Caste. Their physical similarity and their religious practices recreate an Indian image in miniature but the most pathetic state was that they were discriminated in Fort de France by a canal for being regarded as Indian sweepers. 'It happened because the white-mulatto-blackworld presented a common front off unaccommodating frenchness, the Indian remained an outside'. (The Middle passage, 59). Naipaul investigates the conflicts, coercion prejudices, misrepresentation of ethics and the dynamics of attitude change in the perception of religious orientation. The author came across of the drawings done by Alexander Bertrand who showed that Martinique Indians who although Catholic converts, follow Hinduism as regards dancing practices, occasional slaughter of sheep, a degraded form of the degrading *Kalipuja* that takes place in chapel.

Naipaul expostulates the existence of Indian racialism against the West Indian that was the result of harmless egoism, but there was the Negro racialism that had its origin from the advent of Amerindian in Trinidad where already the black negroes were associated with slavery, but these same became the corrupters of Amerindians and hunted them because they could not be tolerated to be termed as 'blacks' or 'Negoes' but wanted to be known as Africans. Their cheap thrill of being an African

without direction could not get them to shake off their guilt and prejudices that imposed upon them by whites in British Guiana or in Trinidad. The alternative to survive among the thrills of being African was only to adapt to Christianity that was modified in their African religion and made them known as 'heathens' and in this way they sorted the distance between blacks and whites; yet the Negroes racial consciousness was kept hurt, humiliated and alive, 'It is felt as a terror to menace a Negro with selling him to Dutchman. The Dutchman, however, has a like terror in reserve, and threatens to sell his slave to a free negro.' (The Middle passage, 191) The distance between the Christian and heathen still could not be bridged; hence the myth of blackness continues to be the incredible imagination in all whiteness. That is as the African-American author describes this 'black' myth as playing in the dark till date.

Naipaul does not seem to depict communal/racial/religious polarization in his writings rather he subjectively puts forth the ignorance, the discrimination and hegemony of particular section over other in order to make the other realize the 'other's gaze' either in the form of believers in social institution, as dominant imperialists/colonisers or as cultural relativists that are found in *'Among the Believers'* book that portrays Khomeini's tyranny in Iran or the subversive attitude in the sub-continent caste/communal groups. Naipaul mentions that in the city of Hyderabad of India 'It was a site that called up awe. But the Hindu temples, expressions of that awe, small, pyramid roofed structures, not old, only pre-1947, had been broken, emptied, cleansed, and then deface with urdu-inscriptions; the enemy utterly cast out. And it was a famous site.' (The Middle passage, 177) In his travelogue *Among the Believers* he has stated an ironical and paradoxical situation of Muslims thinking about their being Muslim and following Islamic principles. When he was on his visit to Islamabad, he was told by one of the drivers namely Masood (a science student) that

'These maulanas,' the driver said, in Masood's translation, are using Islam as a tool. We are Muslims. We are not Muslims in their way. They want to destroy Pakistan. Our Islam is better. We are the only people who can save Islam and Pakistan'. (The Middle passage, 230)

But when he was in Rawalpindi, he came across a rebel and a rationalist doctor who was Shia and said "he had been strengthened, even in everyday matters, by his faith as a follower of Ali. There were five points in his faith; the oneness of God, justice, a belief in prophethood, a belief in imamhood (the reign on earth of an imam as God's regent and spiritual successor to the Prophet), jihad or holy war. Not the holy war the mullahs spoke about, the doctor said; the holy war he had in mind was ' the constant struggle in yourself to fight evil'. (Among the Believers, 201). But the same doctor explains the paradox of holy war in Iran where after the revolution 'killing has not been stopped in the name of God and the executions are decreed by the Islamic revolutionary courts'. (Among the Believers, 202). Naipaul suggests his conscious perception through thought provoking, descriptive and open conversations that he had with Muslim natives of Pakistan and he comes to the reason that:

'the fundamentalists, insecure, with their un-historical view, feared alien contamination. But fundamentalism offered nothing. It

pushed men to an unappeasable faith; it offered a political desert. It violated the 'basics'; it could never wall out the rest of the world. And I thought it was possible, looking not many steps ahead to see how in Pakistan, by the very access of fundamentalism, Islam might be preparing its own transformation'. (Among the Believers: 206)

The author's intellectual and literary pursuit observes the relevance of his own prejudice as regards his own caste, religion and rituals as well as the prevalent faiths and practices, the hypocrisy and false beliefs of the communities in transnational context. Naipaul ironically depicts parallelism for the victims and hypocrites who '*as big fish trying to dictate a small fish with cruelty, injustice and slander*'.

Self-Revelation for Crisis of Humanity: Naipaul has brought personal overtones of the people whom he met during his travel into focus along with their immigrant past. This dichotomy represents a stream of consciousness of the immigrants' predicament. His interaction with his own self, with Mr. Jagan in the British Guiana and Bush-Negro in Surinam, with Negroes of Carriacou plantation, with Aziz in Kashmir explains the fire of emancipation from self-crisis that bound in conflicts of suppression, religious practices or circumstances of mythical image given to each group of society. He elaborates Hindus' (Indians) underdeveloped ego that is bound within family, social institutions and it is 'relatively tenuous' i.e. narrow loyalties and do not help them to relate to reality, instead they search in their 'meditation therapy' a way to continue life amidst the subservience, conquests, subjugation; moreover even in the modern world, their scientific temperament remains subdued and they do not let themselves changed. He agrees to Sudhir Kakkar's analysis of Hindus and he says:

Caste and clan are more than brotherhoods; they define the individual completely. The individual is never on his own; he is always fundamentally a member of his group, with a complex apparatus of rules, rituals, taboos. Every detail of behaviour is regulated—the bowels to be cleared before breakfast and never after, for instance, the left hand and not the right to be used for intimate sexual contact, and so on. Relationships are codified. And religion and religious practices—'magic and animistic ways of thinking'—lock everything into place. The need, then for individual observation and judgement is reduced; something close to a purely instinctive life becomes possible. (India: A Wounded civilization: 91)

Naipaul perceives the contemporary situation from the current perspective and do argumentative analysis not only through his inner expression or subjectivity rather he searches inter-subjectivity vis-à-vis historical, cultural, social and political influences in the conversations, details that he gathers from the people whom he came across and then he frames his literary account within the framework of present keeping in view the past (that he does not falsify or fabricate). Instead his interaction connects the possible probabilities with the logical facts that have so long fore-grounded cultural relativism and racial ghetto in the form of slavery, genocide, apartheid, wildness, violence and savagery. The author nowhere has desired to delineate the memories of

discriminated or subjugated beings as absurdities, rather he projects their choice, their anguish, their predicament and their rebel to decontextualise the postcolonial failings of power, hegemony, holy wars and cruelty which were the operational structures of colonial and postcolonial framework to subjugate '*the Other*' in the context of religious mission, imperial expansion and political orientation. These savage factors are the product of cultural phenomena, which have been turning the post-colonial world to decontextualize such predicaments and crisis of humanity.

We use the term post-colonial to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of the colonization to the present day. This is because there is a community of preoccupation throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression.' (Mukherji,8)

His perception and emotional contact describes "*the act of blocking*" (Patrick,415) while his altruistic behavior as conformity to social norms projects his "*contrary and provocative*" (Patrick,415) voice in his travelogues. The whole world that Naipaul toured appeared to be segmented with this impact and his own conscience is also one among the general crowd who in his lifetime consciously, subconsciously or unconsciously has been impressed with or suffered disillusion of caste, race factors. Yet what makes the study of travelogues so appropriate and pertinent to the present global governance is that there is awareness and maturity as well as illumination of the perceptual selectivity, perceptual defense and perceptual development vis-à-vis fanaticism, fundamentalism, ethnocentricity, totalitarianism and conservatism. Religion in the travelogue *An Area of Darkness* contains self-examination of the featureless images of his subconscious mind that has been formed in the environment provided to him in Trinidad by his parents and grandparents, but later it turns into misconception of the diaspora and expatriate writer who has been far from Indianness and has viewed India from an eye of an explorer who tries to visualize it in certain references and illusions. Naipaul's senses not only perceive but interpret sensory inputs to make it meaningful not only to produce a piece of non-fiction, but the external impressions transform him mystically to get into his self-introspection and this process of transcendence reorders the sensory inputs obtained from external experiences and this stimulates his impulses at first. He gets into fury and becomes outrageous in his expression. The previous memories of religious consciousness, that had faded in accordance to space and time, revives in the '*Pilgrimage*' chapter, his observation turns disastrously prejudiced when *India* of his fantasy appears real after watching the spirit of the thing i.e. *lingam* at Amarnath caves in Kashmir, that releases his outrageous spirit from illusion of being an outsider and he indulges his self into the preoccupation of being one with common Indians' religiosity. He writes:

'The spirit of the thing! Squatting in the cave, which rang continuously with the shouts, and shuffling, concentrating on the bazaar litter on the wet floor, glimpsing out of the corner of an eye ascending crowd whose numbers I could less easily grasp than I

could the size of the mountains and the valleys, I had grown light-headed. Pilgrims, their offerings made, were looking up for the two rock pigeons, followers of Lord Shiva once, before they were turned into pigeons by the anger of their Lord and doomed forever to live near Him in his cave. I did not look up. I went on down the white slope, hopping from rock to rock, and did not stop until I came to the clear stream'.¹⁸ (An Area of Darkness, 170)

Naipaul through his depth perception discovers the path of self-orientation rather than the other's orientation. The author shows conformity to the social norms outwardly and inwardly. In this context it is best to quote Theroux (a nice earnest American novelist) who writes about Naipaul's image:

Until I met Vidia (V.S. Naipaul), I had never known a person who recognized no one as his equal. He's a Brahmin, the local Indians said: all Brahmins are fussy like that.' (Paul, 51)

Naipaul through his own caste-ridden strict attitude felt intrinsically to withhold his attitudes against mild attacks whether of belonging to different community in India or to different race in Trinidad or in Europe. He has sublimated his negativism or biased-ness through *his flight in his writings* that narrate his accounts of real-life experiences, of emotional upheaval, maladjustment or of emotional sanctity. He explains how his writing down traveling memoirs cleanses his ethnic thoughts from malign and menace for other religious communities. Basically what Naipaul tries to suggest through his empirical experience that a person's complaints are primarily psychological or physiological in origin. Both Naipaul and Kakusthan in their respective fanatic beliefs of conserving their cultural practices and prejudices predispose heightened consciousness extrinsically and that causes conflict between unpleasant and pleasant reciprocity to moral norms, nevertheless both are also filtering their prejudicial attitudes by finding stimuli of similarity, proximity and continuity. Because of this paradigm shift in their perception, there is order and meaning on one hand, whereas at the other end there is degree of illumination i.e. Naipaul realizes default of his own (although he has not been into it till he had been to India) and of his brahminical community for practicing 'untouchability' against pariahs, Shudras for centuries due to holy scriptures prescriptions and he also came to know that it is the Muslims who have been a bridge between brahmins and non-brahmins. The author presents an integrative view of human liberation from the clutches of religious orientations that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (the father of Nation of India) idealized. He quotes Mahatma Gandhi's words:

Identity was related to a set of beliefs and rituals, knowledge of the Gods, a code, an entire civilization. The loss of the past meant the loss of that civilization, the loss of the fundamental idea of India, and the loss therefore, to a nationalist-minded man, a motive for an action. It was a part of the feeling of purposelessness of which many Indians spoke, part of the longing for Gandhian days, when the idea of India was real and seemed full of promise, and the 'moral issues' clear. (India: A Wounded Civilization, 60)

But in the traveling accounts of Naipaul there are ironical references of the misrepresented self-cherishing attitude of Hindus, Sikhs etc. who refute Gandhi's ideals as regards Hinduism. For example 'In Madras most of the vegetarian restaurants used to boast themselves as 'Brahmin hotels' – and the Dravidian people would erase the word "Brahmin". Now hotels do not have these words in the city. In those days you would have the "Brahmin hotel" and the 'military hotel'. (India: A Million Mutinies Now, 296). Naipaul says that the 'credibility of this myth' changed its course i.e. the practices of idealization were deformed into cultural relativism after two or three generations because of political encouragement, political security, development in agriculture, the growth of national economy. Naipaul raises a very important question concerning whether individuals can change their attitude under coercion. The answer seems to be largely negative, because such characteristics do not have credibility, but may have power and attractiveness for the community. Without credibility, power cannot propagate democracy and brotherhood; it can only lead to self-laceration, violence, torments, killings, deaths, murders, terrorism, totalitarianism, authoritarianism. Such prejudices infest regionalism, communalism, social ostracism and fundamentalism. It may serve the individual or community needs to feel superior and the need to express aggression, but such feeling of hostility, aroused by frustration, according to psychologists result in *scapegoates* and finally in other's gaze it may be that the prejudice may become reinforced and continue unabated that metamorphically be termed as *scarecrow* or *scaremonger* to spread alienation, resentment, riots, violence and killing. Naipaul has of course been so realistic in illustrating the effects of religious prejudices but his intention is to establish compatibility through his art of writing. Naipaul justifies his vision not through didactic or moral approach, rather he avoids to be directly between the devil and the deep sea, or on the horns of dilemma. His narrative style is motivational and suggests achievement of reality. Another sort of misperception is interpreted as disassociate perception or self-deception, which often is likely to lead to distortion of reality and make it difficult to make a healthy adjustment with the reality, they live in make-believe world. Naipaul writes:

There were people in Pakistan who had taken the faith to its limit. To them Islam was more than personal salvation, more that a body of belief; it had become country, culture, identity; it had to be served, at whatever cost to the individual or the state itself (Among the Believers, 391-392).

Naipaul through his writings has not uttered in any kind the communal division of groups or regions. He says that social crusaders and fanatics who fantasizes their faith, surpasses all extremes of emotional sublimation and forced to the path of identification and aggression.

Conclusion: Thus Naipaul projects the predicaments of humanity in context of their own cultural coercions or cross-cultural fatalism and contentions. He has laid bare before us the suppressed histories of the third world countries of the sub-continent and has left open for us the platform to decide how much we should be sacred and secular to achieve

the better prospects of global understanding and unity. He nowhere suggests any escapism rather he tries to make the reader comprehend that it is we who have to decide to have self-emancipation or self-upliftment by following the path of passive resistance not by brute force that was the path enunciated by Mahatma Gandhi in his book '*Hind Swaraj*'. Alberuni argued that it is very important for people of one country to know how others elsewhere live, and how and what they think. Evil behavior (of which Alberuni had seen plenty in the barbarity of his former patron, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, who had savagely raided India several times) can arise from a lack of understanding of – and familiarity with – other people. To supplement the argument given by one of medieval history visitor to India, it is apt to elaborate this viewpoint by the quote of Prof. Amartya Sen, who writes that moral imagination and reason are the binaries to control oneself and to think for universal welfare:

In trying to go beyond what Adam Smith called our 'first perceptions', we need to transcend what Akbar saw as the 'marshy land' of unquestioned tradition and unreflected response. Reason has its reach – compromised neither by the importance of instinctive psychology nor by the presence of cultural diversity in the world. It has an especially important role to play in the civilization of moral imagination. We need it in particular to face the bats and owls and the insane moon. (Sen, 292)

His travelogues manifest his inward desire to transform the misconceptions as a visionary. His perspective does not disillusion the reader; rather it brings him/her closer to the reality, the darkness, the ignorance and the primitive state of primordial stream of fundamentalism in any corner of the world. His thrust is on spirituality, social order, political upheavals, emotional crisis that have taken place due to the threat to the ethnocentric identity or on the nativity. His sensibility to romanticize the images, the myths as regards the continuity, the custom and the corruption, is worth to explore to know the impact of religiosity in the local and global context.

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