Speculating Socio-Political Scenario of India In V. S. Naipaul's "An Area of Darkness"

Escenario sociopolítico especulativo de la India en "Un área de oscuridad" de V. S. Naipaul

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ABSTRACT

Diaspora novels have brought a new sensation on the literary horizon painting their works of arts with multicultural colors. Naipaul wrote three indian travelogues on India. The major theme of the novel is alienation and isolation. It records the failure of his attempt to settle in India. In this novel, Naipaul began a painful confrontation with the civilization that nurtured him in his earliest years, and which marked him as a kind of resident alien in the west. An Area of Darkness was frankly personal. The novel embellishes the writer's precarious relationship as outsiders and insiders, resulting aggressive comments on Indian society's socio-political existence.

Keywords: Commonwealth, diaspora, India, V.S Naipaul.

RESUMEN

Las novelas de la diáspora han traído una nueva sensación en el horizonte literario pintando sus obras de arte con colores multiculturales. Naipaul escribió tres relatos de viajes indios sobre la India. El tema principal de la novela es la alienación y el aislamiento. Registra el fracaso de su intento de establecerse en la India. En esta novela, Naipaul inicia un doloroso enfrentamiento con la civilización que lo nutrió en sus primeros años y que lo marcó como una especie de extraterrestre residente en occidente. Un área de oscuridad era francamente personal. La novela embellece la precaria relación del escritor como forasteros e internos, lo que resulta en comentarios agresivos sobre la existencia sociopolítica de la sociedad india.

Palabras clave: Bien común, diáspora, India, V.S Naipaul.

INTRODUCTION

Naipaul is one of the highly regarded contemporary writers in the world. His works center on the Third World. Usually, he traveled much of his life and generally his work reflects the thoughts of a stateless wanderer who looks around from a peripheral position. Naipaul's reputation grew along with his work. He has been recognized successively as a Common Wealth writer, a controversial novelist of Third World, a voice of the Indian Diaspora, and a literary figure of the world. This legendary figure died on August 11, 2018, in London, United Kingdom. For Naipaul, the Diaspora experience is a key to the sense of alienation from one's roots and the yearning to find some meanings in one's origin (Tsvetkova et al.: 2019, pp.598-612).

A travel book by an author of little personality is likely to be plain dull; a travel book by an author with pronounced personality (like Mr. Naipaul) is likely to tell us more about the author than about the country. Heads, the country loses; tails the author wons (Rai: 1982, pp.20-87).

The travel narrative, *An Area of Darkness* (1964) describes Naipaul's travel to India. His harsh portrayal of this country caused some critics to accuse him of arriving in India with a rigid bias in favour of Western tradition and ideology. Sudha Rai (1982) observes:

Naipaul is alternatively, an Indian in India and a Western in India. Naipaul's joy, exhilaration, exultation come from his former self; his anger and negativity from the latter self. His flight from India punctuated by his brief returns- the patterns of venture and withdrawal expresses perfectly the dilemma of the expatriate self. In the ultimate analysis, India remains for Naipaul an area of pain (Rai: 1982, pp.20-87).

METHODOLOGY

V. S. Naipaul's relationship with India is always not happy. Separated from India by two generations, Naipaul is far away from India, sufficiently removed in both time and space, to consider it 'an area of the imagination' a repository of memories which blend easily into the most familiar patterns of romantic myth. In other sense, he believes, India is too close for comfort. In the Hindu faith he never fully accepted. The rituals whose meanings he only dimly understood, Naipaul is at once alienated from India and irresistibly, attached to it. Naipaul's India is an area of darkness, a persistent spot of bother. It demands to be known, even if that knowledge causes pain. When he arrives in India, the situation shocks him (Volchik & Maslyukova: 2019, pp.1444-1455). In the words of Suvir Kaul (2003):

The opening sections of An Area of Darkness are thus often about the loss of voice and self-possession (including his 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).

Naipaul's travel book *An Area of Darkness* is an attempt to delve into a past that must always remain out of reach. But India is the site of an impossible return; it is the subject to which Naipaul returns, nonetheless, with an insistence. He tries to articulate that impossibility by the medium of his travel writing. Shuttling between a point of origin and a point of destination, Naipaul's world-weary traveler occupies an intermediary space between return and arrival. Travel writing is the charting of that space- the unfinished chronicle of 'self'.

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RESULTS

The opening scene in *An Area of Darkness* illustrates Naipaul's predicament. A Travelers Prelude is an interlude. Disembarking at the Bombay docks during the prohibition era of the early sixties, Naipaul discovers at customs that bottles of liquor he had brought with him from Alexandria have been seized. Proceeding to Bombay's New Custom House to recover them, Naipaul (1964) runs into bureaucratic difficulties.

'You have your liquor permit?'

I showed [the officer] the stamped and signed foolscap sheet.

"You have your transport permit?"

It was the first time I had heard of this permit…

"Back to the old customs house", I said to the taxi-driver. (Naipaul: 1964)

An Area of Darkness is a reflective and semi-autobiographical account of a year in India. Naipaul believed that India which served as the background to his childhood was not the real country but 'an area of imagination'. It was an isolated area that produced his grandfather and many others. They were born in India and but later on left India to work as indentured labourers in different country.

In "A Resting Place for Imagination", Naipaul portrays the characters of two persons, such as Gold Teeth Nane and Babu. Through these characters, he explains his view of India, which describes him as an alienated man from India in the minds of the people.

India is present more in things than in people. Naipaul considers the things as well as the people produced by India, featureless and dark (Chakraborty: 2019). His grandfather though abandoned India, did not forget Indian customs and manners. He overlooked each colonizers fashion he could have found in Trinidad when he was building his house in Trinidad. Nothing but his village in India enticed and forced him in every activity. In Trinidad, life was easy because the settlers had their preference in everything. They learned to work without sweepers, weavers, dyers, workers in brass, and makers of string beds. But the masons, carpenters, and cobblers were available (Dhaliwal: 2019). Naipaul was terrified to see Indian uncleanliness. People feed animals in plates that they have used. The children shared many kinds of sweets with one another. Women used the same ladles for sipping which they used to stir their other pots (Freeks: 2016, pp.236-248; Kumar: 2020). Naipaul's imagination towards the caste difference and religious rituals is highlighted. Caste in India meant to harm and division but in Trinidad, it did not affect the lifestyle of the people. He was detested to see the Indians staining their hands with caste distinction. Naipaul had no regard for Hinduism or its religious ceremonies. He disliked the thread ceremony of the newborn. Writers of the West Indies particularly George Lamming criticized Naipaul for failing to give enough attention to non-Indian groups in his books. Naipaul found his private world shrinking and fading from India's featureless darkness (Riley: 1975; Priya et al.: 2017). Naipaul's agony over the decay of old custom is well justified. Indians respected the ancient order and established the world. Naipaul rejected tradition, and he was scandalous when he learned that candles and electric bulbs were used for the Diwali festival in Bombay. But in Trinidad, the people of Indian origin have been using rustic clay lamps (Kok: 2016, pp.1-7). In Trinidad, England, and Egypt, to be an Indian is to be distinctive. But in Bombay, his reality is denied and he has realized that he is faceless in the large crowd without any identity. Dhawan (2000) illustrates. In *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul has become a victim of the dilemma…why use the western criteria in determining India to be an area of light or darkness… I wish Naipaul could identify himself with the dirt, squalor, and poverty of India (Dhawan: 2000; Perera: 2009, pp.82-106) Naipaul in his second chapter "Degree" states that India is the poorest country in the world. Indian poverty has made the life of the people more complicated. Thus Naipaul is alive to the problem of poverty which is present throughout the country at the time of writing. Naipaul then speaks of the differences between the rich and the poor. He throws light on the truth, that always the poor people are suppressed in the hands of the rich people. Through the incident of Ramnath and Malhotra, he proves his statement. As Ramnath refused to obey

him, Malhotra dismissed him by using his influence and power. Naipaul has looked hard at the reality of India. What he saw pained him, shocked him, disillusioned, and enraged him (Rai: 1982, pp.20-87). Naipaul states that Indians were not regarded as human beings, even by another Indian. Everyone is selfish and jealous of others. Even they did not give proper respect to their occupation. Instead of training their wards in their profession, they are seeking for some other jobs. Naipaul considers Hindu's holy book *Bhagavath Gita* to be destructive and ineffective as it has created a psychological barrier which leads to frustration in the minds of the people. Naipaul states that Mahatma Gandhi is a failed reformer, though he succeeded politically. There is nothing left of Gandhi in India other than his name and idolize him. People are fake who have no respect for him but worship his statue just for a formal thing. As Gandhi becomes a God, his message is lost. *An Area of Darkness* proves adept, however, at covering the traces of its recognitions. The India that Naipaul presents in *An Area of Darkness* is a country in a spectacular state of decay. Its people are "degraded" and "stupefied", its religions "outmoded", its buildings, if not already in ruins, "hint at the imminence of their own destruction" (Naipaul: 1964; Mittapalli & Hensen: 2002). India by no mean has created fascination to V S Naipaul. He considers it a failed state where there is nothing but corruption and darkness. His journey of one year has not taught him acceptance, instead he had learned his alienation from India. He was proud and happy that he is colonial, with no past attachment and forefathers. In this novel, Naipaul talks about the grand history of the Indian Railways. The travelling through rail was a thing of beauty, mesmerizing for travellers. The railways are the centre of social activities. They reveal Naipaul's futility and limitless pain about India (Saenko et al.: 2020, pp.88-103).

My train was due to leave in about two-hours; the coaches were waiting. I changed my third-class ticket for a first-class one, picked my way down dim platforms, past the bodies of dogs and men, past third-class carriage which was already hot. The conductor opened the door of my compartment and I climbed it. I bolted the door, pulled down all the blinds, trying to shut out the howls of dogs, shuttling out intrudes all those staring faces and skeletal bodies. I put on no lights. I required darkness (Naipaul: 1964).

Naipaul visits the village of the Dubes, to meet the members of his grandfather's family. His first visit there is equally marked by a sense of joy. But after returning from the village, Naipaul has a near-mystical experience. When Naipaul encounters Ramachandra Dube, the present head of his grandfather's clan of the Dubes, he is filled with dismay. His early joy melts away (Akhmetyanov: 2015, p.543).

An Area of Darkness is a kind of fiction used to justify his need for darkness. Through skillful manipulation of the conventions of travel writing - the focus on externals, the tendency to remain on the surface of things, with anecdote replacing analysis-Naipaul attempts both to detach his readers from himself. It is part of the success of *An Area of Darkness* that it keeps its readers at a distance from a nonetheless intensely personal text. *An Area of Darkness* is an intermediary between confessional autobiography and investigative journalism. Thus his travel writing moves freely between personal inquiry and social inquiry (Humbatova & Hajiyev: 2019, pp.1704-1728).

DISCUSSION

In the final section of the book, Naipaul describes his return to Kashmir. He claims to have cured himself of his earlier fears and neuroses. "Shedding [his] Indian nerves, abolishing the darkness that [previously] separated [him] from [his] ancestral past" (Naipaul: 1964). Naipaul professes to have come to a terminal decline. Far from it, it is a country which retains a seemingly limitless capacity to reinvent and regenerate itself. In his novel, *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul's narrates the panoramic vision of the problem of identity. He finds rootlessness and displacement in his own country where his ancestors lived for many years. However, this gloomy existence helped him to develop his creative mind for many literary creations. As a diaspora writer, Naipaul's approach is very much limited (Musina: 2012, p.11). His writings were full of gloomy and isolated experience that he got in India. The theme of exile and alienation is so pervasive in Twentieth-Century

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Literature of exile. To Naipaul, the India that he associated with the people and the things around him remained featureless. He states that:

I thought of the time when the transference was made as period darkness, darkness which also extends to the land, as darkness surrounds a hut at evening, though for a little way around the hut there is still light. The light was the area of my experience in time and place (Naipaul: 1964).

When he came to India he found it to be an alien land. Without the Indian religious attitudes, which a hundred years of exile had been enough to eradicate, he experienced pain. A stranger in India, he carries in his psyche 'phantasmal memories of old India' which outline for him 'a whole vanished world'. His myriad heritages and the bizarre dislocation that left him bound up with three societies, but unfortunately none for him, made him to write novels. Interestingly, he got not only impelling factor there but subject matters for his writings also.

An Area of Darkness is a genuine effort to make Naipaul look like a simple and straight forward man and the underlying self-portrait is not a flattering one. His nerves are constantly on edge, he seems to be always on the defensive. His responses are always irrational and quit reproaching itself (Galieva et al.: 2016, pp.36 – 37).

The islanders, in the course of acquiring an identity of their own, become, paradoxically, even more, displaced. Independence only makes them dependent on the outsider's view of them. Independent India too was learning to see herself through European eyes. It was Europe that revealed India's past to India and made its veneration part of Indian nationalism (Naipaul: 1964).

Naipaul's explicit intention as stated in his work is to discover his roots and identify that he suffered because of cultural and emotional alienation from his birth. He heard a lot about India through his parents. Since he started understanding the world, he fantasized about his country India. During his visit to India, he expected to realize the romanticized vision of his forefathers' land.

Critics spoke of his relocation, of the birth of an outsider, a resident of an entirely colonized island, without a natural residence but India, where he returned sometimes, only to recall his isolation from his origins. *An Area of Darkness* is a personal experience and cultural disinheritance saga of a dislocated man who confesses it honestly. It is really disheartening that his visit to India His visit to India validates his fear and eerie that his country of origin is still a dark area. He visit to India where his forefather lived showed his alienation as well as love for this wide varied land. When he visits the country and village of his ancestors, meets Dube, his experience is disappointing. The Brahmin of Trinidad got unable to develop any significant and emotional attachment with his Brahmin forefathers in India. This unreal world and disconnectivity makes him rage, disappointed, and full of futility.

K. Manish (2000) observes that "the darkness of Naipaul is the darkness of his own situation born out of a romantic reverie which stands the glare of the day" (Dhawan: 2000). Helga Chaudhary, a West Indian Critic, perceived in *An Area of Darkness* a candid appraisal of the author's problem of alienation and psychological ambiance, both in relation to the Caribbean and to India.

CONCLUSION

It is to be supposed that Naipaul did not have much experience with Indian people. Whatever he observed, he did mostly through the Western mindset. He observed Indian life from distant and so gave a narrow opinion about Indian socio-political scenario. The contact with the reality taught him only how far he had grown away from the country. It was a disturbing experience and at the end of it Naipaul felt that "it was a journey that ought not to have been made; it had broken my life into two" (Naipaul: 1964). The last sentence alone is enough to indicate the strength of the association that linked him to the country of his ancestors. He had come in the hope of discovering his roots; the trip only confirmed his rootlessness. The affair, however, did not end here. Just as 'tropical Trinidad' has continued to 'haunt' Naipaul's imagination, so some irresistible fascination

has drawn him to India-again and again. As the title implies there is no optimistic view of India in this novel. Naipaul has looked into the dark side of India only and has not taken into account the bright side. Ezekiel (1974) propagates the idea that "darkness, packed with a kind of life which is death, a negation, a distortion and degradation from which he is glad finally to escape" (Ezekiel: 1974, pp.71-90).

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