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The Review of V.S. Naipaul and William Dalrymple on the Indian Society as Potrayed in the Travel Writings

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Abstract – Travel literature is travel writing of literary value. It is literature written in various languages which faithfully portrays experiences of an author visiting a place for the pleasure of travel. An individual work is sometimes called a travelogue or itinerary. Travel literature may be cross-cultural or transnational in focus, or may involve travel to different regions within the same country. India has been a favourite destination for people all over the world. It has been frequently visited by a lot many writers among whom a few are renowned travel writers of this century. Two among them are William Dalrymple and V.S.Naipaul who have visited India every now and then and have also penned down their reflections in form of travel memoirs that leaves us amazed because of the minute and critical observation of the country.

Keywords – Travel, Portrays, Indian Society, Naipaul, William Dalrymple

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INTRODUCTION

The ethno-historical significance & narrative question impose a privileged status on travel writing, which has been greatly enhanced in recent decades, & prestige of a category that has been overlooked up to now has risen considerably. Bookshops specialize with travel guides, travel books – faithfully followed by talk books as many foreign languages – & more historical-conscious customers will search for the ancient Greek & Roman travelogues with an apparent increase in the popularity of travel writing towards the end of the 20th century. Paul Theroux, Bruce Charwin, Ryszard Kapucinski and Robyn Davidson are commonly accepted contributors, to whom Naipaul must be duty-bound.

Evaluating his own writing, Naipaul stresses the uniqueness of his kind of 'travel writing' in which he does more than explain the paths he takes throughout his travels: "What I do is different. I'm traveling on a subject. I'm going to ask. I'm a writer not. I carry with me the gifts of compassion, insight, and interest which I have acquired as an inventive poet. The books that I am writing now, these investigations, are narratives that are really created.

A website distributes an summary of the different types of popular literature, established by American literature studies, and based on internet resources, counting upwards of thirty-six distinct classifications, including the travelog (or travel composition). The definition given is as fundamental as far as it is concerned:

"Travel literature is travel writing of a non-fiction type. Travel writing typically records the experiences of travellers in some interesting places and circumstances. It will include vivid descriptions, illustrations, historical background, and possibly maps and diagrams." 1

Equivalent status can be provided through: romance, exploit exciting activity, dream, secrecy, officer imaginary tale, and rundown. Including an additional class that they term artistic non-fiction, pursue with the subsequent clarification, is astonishing:

"According to Columbia College Chicago, creative non-fiction '...comes in many forms: memoir, narrative journalism, travel writing, personal essay, descriptive storytelling...

What they all have in common is a basis in reality from careful observation to honest emotional truth.'"2

Included between the academics are David Sedaris ('the demigod of journalists'), Dave Eggers (writer of the self-portraying book A distressing exertion of overwhelming intelligence, and Zeitoun) and Hunter S. Thompson, writer of terror and dislike to Las Vegas: The Wild trip to the spirit of the American

vision. It's anything but a shocker to the American understudies don't refer to Naipaul, it could be said that the two meanings include components that also relate to the travel writing of Naipaul.

NAIPAUL'S SLANT ON HISTORY

Benjamin Disraeli, a Jew who had converted to Anglicanism, used to identify himself as the blank page between the Old and New Testaments. And claim it doesn't feel nearly as momentous, but there's a correlative Naipaulian: V.S. Naipaul is the blank page between British colonialist culture and postcolonial academic ethos. He is at once a latecomer to the colonial world , especially the genre of colonial travel-writing (−Conrad had gone prior to actually me everywhere) & precursor to a new type of transnational writing,1 to be taken up and expanded by writers like Amitav Ghosh and Caryl Phillips. Yet Naipaul is also more intimate in between, inspired by his father's problems with language and self-representation and that of the urban community of authors and publishers he encountered in London. His novels are also distinctly − "readerly" in the context that most frequently they concentrate on protagonists involved in reading scenes themselves. But if colonization and hegemony in Naipaul 's work are two powerful topics, there is also a third, less explored, place of entanglement in the prose, and that is the conflict between Naipaul's secularism (or atheism) and a sense of religious identity as a Hindu. In some of his books, this convoluted connection of faith is alluded at but is palpably evident in his more recent works of nonfiction. Needless to say, Naipaul 's ambivalent relationship with secularism is deeply imbedded in both of a writer's other, more familiar stories − "in between." Our intent here is to try for a balanced look at Naipaul's controversial comments on secularism in India in particular. The anti-secular remarks from Naipaul will be explored in detail, but so will elements of his prose that could create a more positive picture. Some elements of Naipaul's writerly character remain disturbing and self-contradictory even after close reading, reminding one that secularism's stance can sometimes be manipulated.

But that clearly shared voice is relatively new in Naipaul 's writing. Historically, the animosity of Naipaul has been aimed at all sorts of religious fanaticisms like Muslim, Hindu and Christian types. Although the animosity to Islam and Islamic fundamentalism is now clear, a close look at the autobiographical writings of Naipaul and his writings on India still reveal a strong sense of disdain towards Hindu rituals and religious beliefs. Along these lines, one thinks of A House 's protagonist for Mr. Biswas (1961), criticizing the Brahmin ritualism of his rich in-laws soon after marriage: −'Idols are the stepping-stones for the worship of the actual. Only in a religiously backward community are they required (Biswas, 130). The dabbling of Mr. Biswas with Hindu reform movements such as the Arya Samaj (close to the Brahmo Samaj with which Tagore was associated) contributes to a direct confrontation with the leadership of the family, contributing to embarrassment. Similarly, Ganesh Ramsumair, the narrator of the comic novel The Spiritual Masseur (1957), is a young author and mystical merchant, who attempts to emulate the postures of a holy man for both dramatic and economic and political advantage. Naipaul has a lot of fun with Ganesh, none more than when he's got two books written in close succession — What God Told Me, a theological apology, and Profitable Evacuations, a constipation essay. Naipaulian humor at its finest is the juxtaposition of the two radically different titles: the material world brings spiritual idealism back to earth with a jolt. Unlike Shakespeare, Naipaul is instinctual and rooted in following a secular world-view. It is more of a personality than an accepted philosophy, and it is so deep that it seems to contradict the previous controversial public comments made by Naipaul.

Even if he harbors certain egregious anti-Muslim sentiments, it is far from clear that Naipaul has ever been a devout Hindu. Indeed, in the very same book where he inveighs against the Mughal Empire, and laments what he sees as a thousand years of cultural and religious subjugation in the subcontinent, Naipaul also robustly attacks Hindu fatalism as it operates in Indian politics in the midst of Indira Gandhi's Emergency. While Naipaul attacks Islam's destructive ferocity, Hinduism's waste lies in its tendency to promote an attitude of passive acceptance, which is encapsulated in the conversion of Mohandas Gandhi's politics into a kind of state religion in independent India. In the domain of literature, Naipaul sees Hindu fatalism most directly expressed in the writing of R.K. Narayan, whose statement that —India will go onll becomes a kind of index to a litany of failures Naipaul sees in early Narayan novels like Mr. Sampath, which ends in the eponymous protagonist's withdrawal, following the failure of his various worldly endeavors. Naipaul reads Narayan as resorting to an unfortunate kind of mysticism, which combines a misuse of Gandhi with a timeless, "Hindu" passivity:

Gandhian nonviolence has degenerated into something very like the opposite of what Gandhi intended. For Srinivas, nonviolence is not an intervention type, a collective consciousness quickener. This is only a way of maintaining an undisturbed calm; it is non-doing, non-interference, detachment of culture. It fuses one's identification with the concept of self-frealization, reality. Such modern-sounding words, which equate Srinivas with the plight of the poet, mask an embrace of karma, the Hindu assassin, the Hindu peace, which assures us that we compensate for what we have done in past lives in this life: so that all we see is just and good, and the suffering we see is to be appreciated as a divine entertainment, a reminder of our obligation to ourselves, our potential lives.6

Here Naipaul is performing somewhat of a tricky operation. He takes a literary narrative written in the 1930s that invokes Gandhi, and applies it to the political situation of the 1970s—as something timeless, though the meaning of Narayan‘s novel in 1940 and its meaning in 1975 must be two separate things. Another questionable move is the mistranslation of “karma,” which strictly speaking refers to deeds and duty; the emphasis on past lives is somewhat of a western misinterpretation of the concept. Karmic fatalism may indeed be an unfortunate state of mind, but it‘s unclear whether it refers to the western idea of Hinduism of Hinduism per se.

NAIPAULIANS AGAINST NAIPAUL: AMITAV GHOSH AND AMITAVA KUMAR

Greater symmetry with regard to religion specifically can be found in the work of writers who have acknowledged the influence of Naipaul on their development as writers, especially Amitav Ghosh and Amitava Kumar. Along with symmetry, there is a clear sense of mission in these writers’ works that challenges Naipaul’s passivity. For some Indian literary secularists, at least, the task of the writer is not merely to diagnose the problem but to participate in some fashion in resolving it.

Ghosh both acknowledges Naipaul and distances himself from him in an essay on communalism and the responsibility of the writer that he wrote in the wake of the deadly riots that took place in Delhi in 1984. The essay was written in 1995, and reprinted in Ghosh’s recent volume of essays, Incendiary Circumstances:

Years before, I had read a passage by V.S. Naipaul that has stayed with me ever since. I have never been able to find it again, so this account is from memory. In his incomparable prose, Naipaul describes a demonstration. . . . To his delight, the sight fills him with an abstract sadness, a form of melancholy; he is conscious of a urge to go back, to enter, to combine his interests with theirs. And he realizes he can never; entering crowds just isn't in his design.

I have read all of Naipaul's that I might put my hands on for several years; I couldn't get enough of him. I read it with the shameful personal care that one holds for one's most professional interlocutors. This was he who first made me think of myself as a novelist, working in English.[13]

This is a key moment for Ghosh—one of the critical ethical revelations that informs his project as both secular and ethical. For Ghosh, there is no contradiction in choosing the life of the detached, secular writer while also contributing to movements that further the cause of social justice.

And yet, at the same time Ghosh’s novels and nonfiction books have responded to the challenge of identifying as a fully secular being in the South Asian context. Here religious identity is personal—it is marked in one‘s name, in the texture of one‘s family life, and of course, on the body. Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines and In an Antique Land both contain powerful revelations of the intimacy of both religious identity and the —veil‖ it casts over secular self-definition. For the secular intellectual at the contemporary moment, Ghosh argues, there is always a certain anxiety about the failure of one‘s own secularity, which comes from within:

The specific fear has a texture which you can't forget or explain ... It's a terror that stems from the awareness that normalcy is completely subjective, that the environments that surround us, the streets that one inhabits, will unexpectedly become as violent as a desert in a flash flood, without warning. It is this that separates the thousand million people that inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world — not language, not food, not music — it is the special quality of isolation that develops in the mirror out of fear of the battle between oneself and one's face..[15]

In some sense, Kumar‘s act of conversion (which is —real‖ because of its social consequences—even if it is not the sincere conversion of a devout believer) is the most radical experience of secularity imaginable. Like Daniel Deronda in Eliot‘s novel, Kumar has to confront the limits of his intellectual sense of tolerance as he experiences a change in his fundamental social identity through the experience. The —sublime rootlessness‖ he sees in Intizar Husain‘s words is a powerful metaphor for both the deep implication of Hindu and Indo-Islamic cultures in the Indian subcontinent, and the challenges Kumar faces as he travels across it.

Though both Kumar and Ghosh affirmatively invoke Naipaul in their introspective writings, their articulation of a troubled secular literary sensibility differs from Naipaul‘s in one important way. Both Kumar and Ghosh are both directly selfconscious about the limits of their ability to be utterly detached. At times, the writer is implicated merely by the accident of a name or heredity. But even where the —joining‖ the cause of social justice or secularism is seen as purely elective, the disavowal of total detachment is one of the key components of literary secularism. Though Naipaul experiences much of the same doubt and internal struggle described by Ghosh and Kumar, he insists upon his detachment despite evidence to the contrary. For Naipaul, this detachment is tied up with a discourse of writing as a profession of “purity” or “nobility,” but upon reading closely one sees that these terms are themselves derived from religious experience.

SECULARISM IN A SENTENCE: NAIPAUL’S WRITERLINESS

As I have suggested, Naipaul‘s early non-fiction autobiographical engagements with Hinduism paint a rather more complex portrait of his relationship to

Hinduism than his chauvinistic comments might lead us to expect. We could just as easily turn to one of the autobiographical fictions (such as A House for Mr. Biswas), since the line between fiction and autobiography is frequently arguable: so many of the plots revolve around events like the discovery of literacy, the hunger for education, the explosion of print culture, father-son conflicts, and of course the moment of departure from the marginal society for the metropolitan center. But for the purposes of simplicity, it might make sense to stay with a text that is clearly marked as autobiographical, Naipaul's 1982 "Prologue to an Autobiography." And within that text, which is roughly about 70 pages in length, I'll focus on the question of religion through Naipaul's concept of the sentence. For Naipaul, it is the sentence that is the key to the existence of the writer, the entity that defines him over anything else. I'll examine just a few carefully crafted but telling sentences where Naipaul foregrounds this atomistic core of writerly effort, with an eye to the growing incursion of the Hindu background into the scene of writing. The first sentence describes Naipaul's situation as he wrote the very first sentence of his first book, Miguel Street, in the early 1950s:

This is now almost 30 years after I wrote the first paragraph of my first publishable book in a BBC room in London, on an old BBC typewriter,& on perfect, 'non-rustle' BBC script document.[18]

By placing himself so pronouncedly at the BBC, Naipaul establishes himself at one of the great centers of the modern media, and as completely separate from his Trinidad background. Note how often he repeats the acronym in the sentence above: "BBC room" (secular space), "BBC typewriter" (secular equipment, modern technology)[19], and "BBC script paper" (modern medium). The BBC entrism of this passage raises a question about authorship—did the BBC write the novel, or did Naipaul? The sentence itself answers, with its turn to the declarative: "…I wrote the first sentence." But context returns subtly—it's not the first sentence of his first short story ever, but the first sentence of his first publishable book. This first sentence of Naipaul's —Prologue to an Autobiographyǁ isn't the beginning of Naipaul's story, so much as it is the beginning—or prologue—to a publication history.

Even though it is evidently the BBC that makes Naipaul's jump into a career as a writer possible, the actual act of writing requires the implication of oneself in one's own history. As Naipaul writes later in the same essay (the theme is echoed often), "I had assumed I had to quit to become a novelist, the worthy thing. It was really important to go back to studying. This was the initiation of self-knowledge "(34).

It turns out that the key to self-knowledge for Naipaul here as elsewhere is his father, and as the "Prologue" moves forward it comes to feel more like a post-script to his father's career than as the prologue to his own. It is Naipaul's father who transmits the "vocation" of writing to his son. And it is his father's failure as a writer that is the core of the story here, just as it is in A House for Mr. Biswas. The reasons for failure[20] are multiple and somewhat over-determined—a mix of colonial marginality, lack of formal education, and the pressures of Hindu family life. What is not mentioned is how the son, who inherited his father's vocation, managed to avert his father's fate.

What is striking in all of this is the importance of the Hindu religious and social framework to Naipaul despite his avowed distance from the religion. To begin with, Naipaul's father was expected to become a Pandit, and his turn to writing seems to be marked as an only partial escape from that calling: "It was a version of the pundit's vocation" (54). Writing, as a form of solitary and detached work that nevertheless carries the burden of representation for an entire community, does seem to be a possibly secularized version of a priesthood. But how secular is it? Naipaul's father signs his weekly column with the Trinidad Guardian with the byline, "The Pandit," and writes more or less consistently about the Hindu community in Chaguanas. Naipaul also repeatedly describes his father's career in terms of a kind of spiritual quest21, which is in some sense continued in Naipaul:

From the earliest stories and bits of stories my father read to me, before the upheaval of the move, I had arrived at the conviction—the conviction that is at the root of so much human anguish and passion, and corrupts so many lives—that there was justice in the world. A result of this has been the ability to be a novelist. To be a novelist just like O. Henry was to prevail in death, to perish in mid-sentence. And like a wild religious faith which is hardening in hardship, this determination to be a novelist, this unwillingness to be extinguished, this willingness to achieve justice at any future date, intensified as our circumstances deteriorated in the street room.

Dalrymple's visit to Sravanabelagola's ancient pilgrimage town allowed him get an insight into the Jainism religious traditions. He was narrated about the division of religion into two sects with Digambara being more severe than Swetambara in following the religion. Prasannmati Mataji is practicing *aparigraha* as a Jain Nun who left her family long time back after the words and teachings of Dayasagar Maharaj altered her life. At the age of fourteen she joined the Sangha and realized that knowledge, meditation and penance are only the realities of life, a way to attain Moksha. After taking Diksha she met a friend and companion nun Prayogmati who decided to take sallekhana (ritual fast to death) due to her illness and despite of having no worldly relations Prasannmati Mataji can't get rid of her attachment with her . Ultimately Dalrymple came to know that Mataji was also following the path of her friend and has taken

Sallekhana which is the aim of all Jain munis. It is the last renouncement.

The next Dalrymple is met by the Dancer of Kannur, Hari Das an articulate Theyyam dancer who works as a manual labourer and a warder during the weekend at Tellicherry Central Jail. He leaves his job between December and February and becomes (enacts) God. His Character brings out a huge contrast present in the Indian culture. Hari Das is a Dalit, and is expected to bow head and stand at a respectful distance from the upper caste person. Throughout the year he is treated as a dalit but during his performances while he is God incarnate he is bowed down by all the people of the village.

The Daughters of Yellamma presents a miserable plight of the devadasis who have been dedicated to Goddess Yellamma by their parents and the known ones during their childhood. The word devadasi comes from Sanskrit word 'deva' meaning God and 'dasi' meaning a female servant. These women enter the cult for the service of god or goddess but today these women are nothing but a synonym to prostitutes. Being devadasis, the people respect them as they are regarded auspicious and are called to upper caste weddings to give blessings ,but the reality is revealed in Rani bai's (a devadasi) statement when she says ' Everyone sleeps with us but no one marries us. Many embrace but no one protects'. Their works gives their family financial support and make their life full of riches. But when these devadasis suffer from communicable diseases which are lethal the insensitivity of their families come to forefront. The families discard them, their children reject them and they are compelled to live a pathetic life on roads without any protection. These lives of devadasis show us how they are cursed for crimes outside the bonds of marriage. These devadasis not only live a harsh life but also meet a dreadful death.

Lal Shahbaz Qalander whose shrine is visited by Dalrymple was known as 'an unruly friend of God'. He followed a religious path where he rejected the material world. He encouraged his followers to dance their way to God. Today the qalanders of Sehwan embrace an inner path and live like the Hindu *sadhus* and *tantrics* rejecting convention. One of these is Lal Peri, a woman from Bihar who ended up in Sufi Shrine in Sindh (Pakistan). She was forced to leave her village in Bihar and move to Pakistan due to the communal riots. Then one day she had a dream where she was told to come to the shrine of Shahbaz Qalander. Today after spending many years here she feels the place has a strong power, where she is protected and accepted, though she fears the advance of Wahhabis and what this advance means for Sufism in their region.

CONCLUSION

Travel literature is travel writing of literary value. It is literature written in various languages which faithfully portrays experiences of an author visiting a place for the pleasure of travel. An individual work is sometimes called a travelogue or itinerary. It has been frequently visited by a lot many writers among whom a few are renowned travel writers of this century. Two among them are William Dalrymple and V.S.Naipaul who have visited India every now and then and have also penned down their reflections in form of travel memoirs that leaves us amazed because of the minute and critical observation of the country.

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2. Naipaul, Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted People,, xii

3. Quoted in William Dalrymple, "Sir Vidia Gets It Badly Wrong."

4. Outlook India, March 15, 2004. Accessed online at: http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fodname=20040315&fname=Naipaul+%28F%29&sid=1&pn=1.

5. Quoted in William Dalrymple, —Sir Vidia Gets It Badly Wrong.‖ (2004)

6. Amitav Ghosh alludes to the modernism of the new Islamic movements in his Naipaulian nonfiction work, In an Antique Land. At one point he encounters an Imam during his studies in Egypt. The Imam can't fathom the idea of the Hindu custom of cremating one's dead, and attacks it as —primitive,‖ much as an unreconstructed western anthropologist might have, fifty years ago: —'Why do you allow it? Can't you see that it's a primitive and backward custom? Are you savages that you permit something like that? Look at you: you've had some education; you should know better. How will your country ever progress if you carry on doing these things?'‖ (Ghosh, 1992, 235).

7. *Naipaul, India: A Wounded Civilization,* 15.

8. *Naipaul, India: A Wounded Civilization,* 86-87.

9. *Naipaul, An Area of Darkness*, 32-33.

10. Ibid., 33.

11. See Talal Asad's Genealogies of Religion for an example of an anthropological approach to religion beyond the (Christian-centered) orientation to expressions of —belief.‖ Talal Asad, Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

12. *Naipaul, An Area of Darkness*, 73.

13. *Naipaul, An Area of Darkness*, 74.

14. *Ghosh, Incendiary Circumstances*, 197.

15. Ibid., Incendiary Circumstances, 198.

16. *Ghosh, The Shadow Lines*, 204.

17. *Kumar, Husband of a Fanatic*, xxiv.

18. Ibid., 210.

19. *Naipaul*, *Finding the Center*, 3.

20. It's intriguing to think of the centrality of the typewriter here, given its contested status in the halls of the 'serious' writer in 1952. Elsewhere Naipaul talks about how he found using a typewriter very natural. In this he wasn't especially unusual, but perhaps the typewriter belies his obsession with writing as a "noble thing," as a vocation separate from all others.

21. This failure is also everywhere evident in the volume of recently published letters called Between Father and Son. Seeparsad Naipaul repeatedly suggests they collaborate on volumes, or asks his son in London for help in finding publishers. But Vidia clearly has his eyes on his own career.

22. "The Hindu who wants to be a pundit has first to find a guru. My father, wanting to learn to write, found MacGowan. It was MacGowan, my father said, who had taught him how to write; and all his life my father had for MacGowan the special devotion the Hindu has for his guru." (Finding the Center, 55).

23. Ibid., 31-32.

24. Naipaul, *Finding the Center*, 69.

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