CHAPTER 4

Naipaul on Caribbean Culture

V. S. Naipaul visited the Caribbean islands having accepted the invitation by the first elected prime minister of Trinidad, Eric Williams. This adventure resulted into his non-fictional novel *The Middle Passage*. As Naipaul was born and brought up in Trinidad before he left for England at the age of 18, his relationship with the Trinidadian society is peculiar. He returns to his native with certain memories and prejudices in his mind and he had his Western education and Western culture which he adopted. *The Middle Passage, Loss of Al Dorado* and *Killings in Trinidad* are the books which mainly tell about the culture and history of the nation.

From the earlier writings of Naipaul it is clear that he knew very well that there was no proper assessment of the West Indian people and there was none who pointed out what was wrong with the societies. This was perhaps the reason why Naipaul chose to write on the Islands. Naipaul clarifies his position as a writer. At the same time, he expresses his anger for the fact that the West-Indian writers have failed in the presentation of their own societies and the responsibilities towards the own people. Naipaul in his book *The Middle Passage* notes:

> “Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is, and where he stands. Here the West Indian writers have failed. Most have so far only reflected and flattered the prejudices of their race or colour group. Many writers have displayed a concerns, visible perhaps only to the West Indian, to show how removed his group is from blackness, how close to whiteness.”

(1)
Trinidad had become a battleground for the colonizers in medieval time, especially the Spanish and British who were in search of the mythical area supposed to be full of gold. Trinidad was the base from where they tried to explore the way to Al Dorado. Trinidad was very important. Those who ruled in Trinidad could only be the explorer of the mythical gold mines. But it was not easy. On the one hand they had to fight against the opponent colonizers and on the other hand they had to control the cannibal Caribs, the uncontrollable tribe of the Arwacs and the aborigine Indians.

As history suggests, it was Columbus who was the first white man to land on Trinidad. He saw the fertile land and useful jungles. This prompted the Spanish to establish their colony in Trinidad. Naipaul begins his narration with the adventure of one Spanish explorer Antonio de Berrio. It was Sir Walter Releigh who overturned the Spanish rule and conquered Trinidad for the British queen in 1797. The history shaped the demographic elements of the region. The colonizers with sheer brutality made the tribes and red Indians extinct from the land. The black Negroes who were from African jungles were brought for the plantation. The n the indentured workers from India started to populate the island since 1845. This reveals the fact that both the two main races in Trinidad were outsiders. They were displaced and they were slaves. They got their independent as late as in 1965. They first time become aware of the fact that they had now the responsibility to build the nation. But the racial conflict was ages old. The people of Trinidad had to fight against this racial clash as well as their colonized minds-the two chief hurdles in progress.

Naipaul studies all kind of documents from British museum related to the history of Trinidad. The book written by Walter Relaigh also was one of the important sources. He found almost all the travel books written by the Dorado explorers. He the n fictionalized the history in his own way to reveal the facts and culture lying beneath the surface.

In spite of these three non-fictional works Naipaul often and again refers Trinidad in his fictions also. The setting and characters of many of his fictions are Trinidadians. His masterpiece A House for Mr. Biswas (1961), The Mystic Masseur, The Suffrage of Elvira(1958), Miguel Street (1959), A Flag on the
The central issue in *The Middle Passage* is about the racial tension that exists, on surface as well as under it, and the impact of slavery on the culture of the people. Demographically Trinidad is a nation where majority of the people are the African black with the Indians as the second largest group, along with some Chinese, and the white. Ironically the racial prejudices are not between the Blacks and Whites, but between the Black and the Coloured. The outer world may be unaware of the shades of black, but the Black people are racially divided into many groups based on the shades, e.g. Black Negro, Brown Negro, the mulatto etc. These sub-racial prejudices are more severe and detrimental to the integrity and the development of the society. Naipaul observes how this is nothing but one of the psychological damage that foreign rule has affected.

Naipaul observes everything in Trinidad—the houses, the people, the monuments, the government buildings, the streets, things inside and outside, and the people and their behaviour. Naipaul reaches there by a ship and lands at Port of Spain, the Capital of the country. Trinidad was his birthplace. But, as he writes, it was not less than a nightmare for him. Since his childhood days he always wished to leave it. He openly acknowledges the fear that he feels on his arrival, and his dislike for his own birthplace. He writes.
“When I was in the fourth or I wrote avow on the endpaper of my Kennedy’s Revised Latin Primer to leave within five years. I left after six; and for many years afterwards in England, falling asleep in bedsitters with the electric fire on, I had been awakened by the nightmare that I was back in tropical Trinidad.”

The racial tension affected Naipaul’s psyche. It was one of the reasons why he was so keen to leave Trinidad, and also for the decay of the Island. Amod Kumar Rai rightly remarks: “The rivalry between blacks and Indians for political power, their mutual distrust and contempt aroused Naipaul’s fear that Trinidad in fact teeters on the brink of racial war.”

Naipaul thinks that this is an island where people are without any kind of talents or skills. This degraded the nation and the society. He notes: ‘The cricketer was our only hero-figure’.

In the context of talent in journalism in Trinidad, Naipaul thinks that the nation does deserve it because it is condemned here. Experts are continually imported from other countries. Journalism is undermined and underpaid. The newspaper is full of American film gossips and beauty tips. As Naipaul notes it is a trait of a colonized society. Efficiency is neither valued nor paid dually and whatever is unrequired is undesirable also.

Naipaul prime space finds that this happened because people were interested to assess their problems. They were less worried about the history of their own and their nation, because they thought that they were just a dot on the map of the world. They were more interested in the world outside. For them America was more important.

There is an obvious distaste for the immigrants, and especially for those who are from Grenada. Most of them get their entry illegally, and they are responsible for the over-population of the island. This made an adverse effect on the
agriculture sector. The *latifundia* (estates) have reduced in size. There are many reference of it in the calypso sung by the Trinidadians.

Naipaul sites on of them:

*Move, lemme get me share.*

*they beating Grenadians down in the square.*

*Lemme pelt a lash, lemme get a share.*

*they beating Grenadians down in the square.*

*Since they hear we have Federation*

*All of them packing up in this island.* (5)

Naipaul observes that the people of the Island mime whatever is modern, whatever is American. It is a craze to be and to look modern and adopt whatever is American. This caused self-contempt and a mentality to ignore whatever is native, however good it is. This is nothing but the impact of hundreds of years of slavery. The masters have reminded always superior. Naipaul notes ironically, “It means a constant alertness, a willingness to change, a readiness to accept anything which films, magazines and comic strips appear to indicate as American.” (6) This devastated the local industries. ‘It has been said that a country can be judged by its advertisements, and a glance at Trinidad advertising is revealing’. (7) The ads reveal the fact that anything American was superior in quality and the local is rubbish.

The impacts of slavery vary from one island of the West-Indies to another. It is so because the masters were different-British, French, Dutch and Portuguese. Their attitudes to the coloured people and the laws were different. Not only this but the dates of the abolishing the slavery system were also different. The reminders of the slavery system in Trinidad are difficult to find. People don’t remember it. It was abolished as early as the year 1834. But this is not the case in another island. In British Guiana, Suriname, Martinique and Jamaica, on the other hand, slavery is difficult to forget. Giving reference of the some European
writers like Kingsley and Froude, Naipaul notes that the Black in Trinidad were
the happiest among all the West-Indian people.

The colonization by the Europeans has given the Caribbean nations many
wounds and shaped the psyche of the people more in negatively than positively.
One of the adverse effects was the uphold of wrong values. He recollects his
days in Trinidad and is reminded of the fact that the society never upheld the
values like dignity, generosity and pride in one’s accomplishment. They were
found only in books. The lack of communal spirit and national identity was the
result of colonization. A kind of self-contempt for their own nation and a sense
of unimportance developed for themselves: “Trinidad was too unimportant…..which (it) was, as everyone said, a dot on the map of the
world.”

However the race is alienated from their own native. Twenty million Africans
made The Middle Passage and now scarcely an African name could be found.
They don’t have their language, religion or culture in general. They just mimic
their rulers. They don’t have the sense of history. For them their origin Africa is
a place that is quite remote and without any significance. Their treatment to the
African emigrants is peculiar. They are not ready to work with them. They will
not dine with them. They will hardly work beside them, and regards himself as a
creature immeasurably the superior of the new comer. This is the greatest
damage done to the Negro by the foreign rule and slavery. That is it taught them
self-contempt. It has created a sense of the mutual mistrust among them.
Naipaul is told by a Negro that he would not buy a cake from the bakery run by
another Negro. He wanted that his cake should have to be handled by a White or
a Chinese hand. He can’t trust a Negro in the inside chamber of the bakery.

The inferiority complex that the slavery and colonization instilled in the minds
of both the subjects, Indians and the Black developed a kind of mistrust and
contempt for their own people. This was perhaps the worst kind of influence the
colonizers made upon the people. In money matters generally there is almost a
superstition among both Indians and Negroes about the unreliability of their
own race; there is scarcely a Trinidadian who has not at one time felt or said, ‘I
don’t have any luck with my race.’ It is an aspect of the multi-racial society to which sociologists pay little attention.”(9)

The contempt is not limited to the people only but almost all the things which are native and local. The traditional style of the house construction is also disliked by the Trinidadian, though it was really beautiful and conducive to the tropical atmosphere of the city Georgetown. It was a beautiful medieval architectural style to build the houses built with the local timbers and style. But the people prefer the concrete made houses which the Americans use.

The people of the islands of the West-Indies are the immigrants of the African jungle, their attitude vary from one island to another. This is because the reminiscence of the slavery and the colonizers are different. Not only this, but the severity of the slavery system varied in degree in different island. Naipaul writes: “The very word ‘Negro’, because of its association with slavery, is resented by many black Guianese; the preferred word is ‘African’, which will cause deep offence in Trinidad.”(10)

The people in Trinidad are music loving and fond of dancing. But they prefer louder and harsh music. The Radio and rediffusion set in every home are always on. They dance until they sweat. The louder is the voice the more is the enjoyment. If they are not satisfied with the radio, the passing steel band will be invited. If they are more than three, they will start to dance on the music. The Trinidadians always talk at the high pitch of their voice. But one will realize it when he or she leaves Trinidad. Again the audience of the films are as film-crazy as those of the third world country. They prefer ‘quantity’ rather than ‘quality’. They often ask about the length of the film-how many reels? The more are the fight scenes, the more will be the clapping. Naipaul notes that the scenes that exhibit the humiliation of the women are liked by the audience. Naipaul even gives a list of films that became successful.

As the popularity of the films, the magazines betray the same mentality of the people. Naipaul cites the example of one famous magazine, ‘West Indian Home and Family’, a women’s magazine. It has regular columns like the psychologists advice for the family problems. Naipaul satirically writes that the problems and the psychologist both are Americans. Another column is about the dream
interpretation and the one romantic story also was serialized in the magazine. Naipaul observes that the cover page showed a face of a black woman but the lights made her look like ‘copperish’ rather than black.

Talking of the literature written in Trinidad, Naipaul observes that it is without universal appeal as it is not ‘original’. Referring to Graham Greene’s definition of comedy and extending it, Naipaul writes that literature comes out of the strong framework of social conventions of the society, whereas the Trinidadians know only one convention, that is, their involvement with the White world. This is the reason why the literary pieces do not appeal. The reader is excluded. He can witness but can’t participate.

**BRITISH GUIANA**

Naipaul leaves Trinidad and lands on the airport of George Town, the capital of British Guiana. He studies the people here and consciously or unconsciously compares them to the people of Trinidad. A scantily populated island Guyana is 214,999 sq.km in area and in the east of Trinidad. The Spanish explorers had found this island, but the Dutch were the first settlers. Other Europeans settled afterward and that caused a years-long conflict for the control of the island. The British gained the total hold over the island in 1795 until the people got independence in 1966 whereas it was the Dutch who had imported the African slaves for working in the plantation.

While flying over the island Naipaul notes the richness, emptiness and the vastness of the island comparing to its scanty population of six hundred thousand. The first thing that the author notes, while driving towards his hotel from the airport is how the Guianese have lost their art of building beautiful wooden building and started to follow their colonizers blindly neglecting their own sense of the beauty. The most common trait among the colonized people- self-contempt.

“The Guianese know how to build in wood; the humblest wooden dwellings has a righteousness of proportion and
style, while the newer concrete buildings have the recognizable West Indian insipidity and clumsiness. In wood the Guianese have built mosques with minarets and Hindu temple with balustrades and domes; they have built a cathedral; they have even managed Victorian goths. They are profoundly ashamed of this wooden buildings, regarding them as the signs of their poverty and backwardness, shabby substitute for the concrete of a rich island like Trinidad and since everyone also agrees that wooden houses are firetraps, it seems likely that soon only the very poor will live in attractive houses and that Georgetown, the most beautiful city in the West-Indies, in its elegance, unity and spaciousness, will be destroyed."(11)

Naipaul meets many people and talks to them to know more about British Guiana. He visits Dr. Jagan and his family, the politicians. He gives every minute details of her appearance and that of her office. While taking to her Naipaul comes to know about the struggle by the party that Mr.Jagan led on account of the racial problem that British Guiana was facing. Here the racial tension was between the Black and the Indians. She regrets on the division that took place in the party on account of the race. She further informed that her party suffered a great loss as the intellectuals left them. British Guiana did not have the talent that Trinidad had.

When Naipaul visits Rupununi, the Southern most province of British Guiana, he encounters the incident betraying how the Guianese still believes themselves British and superior to their neighbours Brazilians. During the colonized period the colonizers employed the Amerindians to hunt the runaway Negroes. But now the two Negro policemen are searching the Amerindians who are Naipaul’s fellow passengers. They point out the passengers that there was Brazil on the other side of the bush, and they were not cultured people because they were not British like themselves (the Negroes). The Negroes of British Guiana take a pride to be called as the British. They forget the slavery and atrocities exercised by their white masters when they compare themselves to other coloured
The people of British Guiana cannot forget the fact that they were slaves, and they hate the word ‘Negro’, and prefers ‘African’. For them it was more shocking that the aborigines of America also were used to humiliate them by the colonizers: “Wherever one sees Amerindians, it is a chilling memory.”(12)

Demographically the nation is very rich. There is a variety among the Negroes as well as other coloured people. All of them have their different origins and so the cultures. The Amerindians live in a pathetic condition. Naipaul visits one of the Amerindian village and the experience was unique for him. At the very outskirt of the village there was a sign board warning the people who are entering in the village. It said that except the priest and commissioner the travellers and other people are not allowed to enter in the village. It was an order from the village head. However Naipaul could visit the village with a local fellow. Poverty was all around. The village head himself lived in a dire poverty. Naipaul describes his hut:

“It was dark and dirty and dusty and disordered, like most Amerindians’ huts. The sight of exposed food in the midst of the dust and mud has the same effect on me as the scratch of chalk on a board; I could scarcely stay to admire the wai-wai grater-sharp bit of stones stuck into a board-which I had been told was a rare and desirable souvenir. I felt the n that reverence for food-rules for its handling, interdiction was one of the essential of the civilizations.”(13)

The politics in British Guiana is explicitly racial. Almost all the parties claim to be without any prejudices and partiality for any single race but for the people it represents a race-Indian or black or Brazilian or Amerindian or mixed. Dr. Jagan’s party is thought to be a party of the Indians. Another party, the United Force headed by Mr.D’Aguiar is in opposition and promises to the people “more work, more money, more industries, and always criticizing the ruling party. The newspaper ‘Sun’ in its front page printed the new year message given
by Mr. D’Aguiar. It shows that the politics in Guiana, like the third world countries, nourishes on how to protest rather than how your policies differ from those of the ruling party. He says:

“It is my view that it would be hypocritical to wish a bright and prosperous new year to Guianese generally at this period of their country’s history when there is so much hardship and distress in the land through unemployment and underdevelopment and the consequent absence of the means of securing the essentials which make for brightness and prosperity. My new year message to my fellow Guianese is that we, one and all, bestir ourselves and endeavour to put an end to the depressing conditions which surround us in our homeland.”(14)

The people in Guiana, unlike the Europeans, are lethargic and idle. Naipaul notes that the nation is full of natural resources. But the resources are not utilized because the people are not hard working. They are drunkards and lazy people—especially the black. Naipaul’s experiences of the services offered in the restaurants of the Georgetown made him think that the Guianese people are inefficient and lazy. The laziness is added in inefficiency to aggravate the hardship. Naipaul notes down his experiences of visiting café where the waitresses and waiters are not only lethargic but unskilled also. You have to wait for long and it is not guaranteed that you would be served at last, and the reason for that is that you are not familiar in the town. “No coffee comes, though. You are not known in Kat’s Kitchen; therefore you are not served.”(15)

This is one of the series of the events that Naipaul faces while in British Guiana. In another incident at one of the hotels in Georgetown, he waits for his order for more than forty minutes and gets none at last. He gave his clothes for the laundry and when after two days he visited the counter to get it back, they were lying there as they were. The counter man did not respond at all.
Naipaul accompanies Dr.Jagan on his campaign tour. Naipaul notes down that the politics in British Guiana is racial. The Negroes are afraid of the Indian dominance. But Dr.Jagan believes that there cannot be a monopoly of any single race over ‘progress’. In New Amsterdam Naipaul talked to some Negro women. One of them was of the opinion that the Negroes themselves were responsible for their plight. She thought that a Negro woman is without modesty. She jumps into the street and starts dancing, whereas a Portuguese or an Indian woman won’t do it. A Negro wastes his money after drinking, and treats his wife badly. Above all, a Negro is lacking in the family feeling that an Indian does. That makes him vulnerable. Three hundred years of slavery taught him that he is an individual and life is short.

The political campaign style in British Guiana is quite simple and crude. Dr.Jagan and his opponent Burnham, his former associates, addresses small crowds with the help of microphone that sometimes does not work properly. The audience can question or protest any time. This was not believed to be an interruption. The verbal feud was common and racial issue remained central. Naipaul notes Mr. Burnham’s speech:

“I warn the Indians…Jagan has said he wants the control of the commanding heights of economy. The commanding heights. Let me translate it for you: your business, your lands, your shops.”(16)

The rift between the Indians and the Negroes exists and it destroyed the chances of the progress of the country. It is boosted by those who are politically aspired and British Guiana could tolerate it only because of its size and emptiness. Naipaul writes that such a racial tension in Trinidad could ruin it more quickly, had it been there.

Talking of the reasons for the non-progressive state, Naipaul counts many things. Many Guianese thank that it was malaria which devastated the nation and ruined the chances of the progress. But Naipaul holds that there is history as well. The slavery which lasted three hundred years was full of brutality
especially when the Dutch were the rulers. After studying the documents in the British library and the stories of the different voyagers, Naipaul comes to the conclusion that the so far as the treatment to the slaves is concerned the Dutch record is blacker than the French. This made the Africans so much passionate for the independence. But independence for them is not the assertion of pride but more a desire to be left alone, and not to be involved. Hence many African prospectors in the interior of British Guiana live happily in remote areas. The n, there is another reason-land. The fertile coastal strip is below the sea level. It often flooded by the big rivers of the country and it has to be protected from the saline water of the sea. Therefore irrigation and drainage is must, and at large scale which is not possible for the small farmers. The sizes of the estates are small and in addition to this the colonial rule and racial tension and indentured system aggravated the problems. According to the indentured system the workers who were brought from India were promised to give a piece of land after a definite period. But the contract was violated or not executed in time. That frustrated the workers there and it affected their productivity.

**SURINAME**

Naipaul flies to Paramaribo the capital of Suriname a Dutch colony which has yet to get its independence. Suriname is one of the smallest countries in the world. It is in the east of Guiana. The notable thing about this small country is its demographic variety. Majority of the population consist of Indians who had come here as indentured workers, and the Negroes. The Javanese people are also a large group. The aboriginals of this country the Caribs and the Arwacks are in minority. It is also known as Dutch Guiana as it remained a Dutch colony till 1954. The n it was designated as an independent constituent of the Kingdom of Netherlands. It became independent country in 1975.

The very first thing that Naipaul notes within a short period within his arrival is the racial condition which is remarkably different from that of Trinidad and Guiana. Naipaul sees that there is no such racial tension between the two major races-the Indians and the Negroes in Suriname. But the rivalry exists-that is purely economic. The political parties are racial, but the government is a coalition one. Though there was bloodshed in Indonesia following the people’s
struggle to get freedom from the Dutch rule, there is no bitterness between the Javanese and the Dutch people in Suriname.

The people of Suriname share the same vices that the other West Indians do—that is, the mind set that the masters are better than the locals. They, like Trinidadians don’t trust each other. For them a Dutch master is better than a Negro master.

“It is felt as a terror to menace a Negro with selling him to a Dutchman. The Dutchmen, however, has a like terror in reserve, and threatens to sell slave to a free Negro.” (17)

But the fact remains that the Surinamers too share the same trait that the other colonized people do—‘whatever is white is superior’. But there are people in this nation, who are the members of the Nationalist Party, are aware of this detrimental mimicry. Not only this, but they are making others aware of this hollow mentality. The speech of the president of the Nationalist movement which was broadcast from the Suriname radio reveals the same notion. Naipaul notes down the speech:

“A colony is strange sorts of society, a society without an elite….the leaders come from the motherland, are people with another culture…the colonial culture ideal has pronounced bad consequences fro the individuals. It is in fact an unattainable ideal….a few exceptional people…. Come to great achievement, but thereby lose their nationality… and what goes for them does not go for ten thousand others who must remain stuck in a soulless imitation, never achieving their own. They learn to despise their own, but get nothing in its place. So, after the war there were many in Suriname who thought themselves far above the ordinary people because they had been able to assimilate the Dutch language and the Dutch culture. Sometimes they wrote a pretty little poems a ‘la Kloos’, or painted a pretty little picture, or play a Mozart sonata not
without skill; but they were not capable of any true cultural achievements. When this new generation was able after the war to go to Holland in greater numbers…they discovered their cultural emptiness with a shock. They come into contact with the great world, the community of the nations and stood there with empty hands. They did not have their own songs; they hardly had Mozart. They did not have their own literature; they only had Kloos. They have nothing and were worthless elements in the life of the nations. What once was reason for pride—‘Suriname is the twelfth province of Holland’—was now reason for shame and disgrace.**(18)**

In addition to this Nationalist movement there are other factors which are responsible for the variety of the impacts on the Suriname cultures. One of the important factors is the attitude of the Dutch people to the colonized as the colonizers. There is a vast difference between the attitudes of the British, French and Dutch as the colonizers. Consequently the impacts on the cultures of Trinidad, Guiana, Suriname and other colonies are different from each other. The British always thought the colonized as the barbarous and needed to be trained and taught. But they never believed that they could become ‘British’. But the Dutch offered a greater assimilation and proclaimed that the Surinamers too can become ‘Dutch’. They never made it obligatory. The Surinamers believe that there are equal opportunities for them in mother country, Holland. But same is not the case with the Trinidadians or other colonized people. In spite of the cruelty, the Dutch as the colonizers had this distinct trait. But when the Dutch left the colony the island become a state without national culture, and demographical or cultural variety. The different group started to live in their own way.

The Indians speak Hindi still; the Javanese live, a little bemused in their own world, longing in this flat unlovely
land for the mountains of Java; the Dutch exists in their self-sufficient Dutchness, the Creoles in their urban Suriname Dutchness; in the forest, along the rivers, the bush-Negroes have recreated Africa.” (19)

The impact of the Nationalist movement, however, is self-paradoxical in nature. One of the members told the author that the cultures of the Indians and the Javanese are obstacles in the development of the national culture. But the Negroes have started to know about the culture of the bush-dwellers who represent the African culture. For them it was easy to discover their past. But the Trinidadians abhor at the very word ‘Africa’.

There are many shades of the Nationalist movement. Naipaul meets one of the prominent leaders of the movement, Mr. Eduard Bruma, a young Negro lawyer. He believes that the movement is not against any race. But the Dutch don’t believe it. Naipaul gives credit to the movement for bringing up the issue of the racial problem in public debate. They did not go to the extreme the way black Muslims did at other places in form of Jihad; or the blacks did in America by throwing Christianity and adopting Islam. They are just inclined to promote the Suriname culture without suggesting what it is and how to do it. Naipaul thinks that the solution is to accept that there is no solution at all:

“But how can Christianity be replaced? By adopting Islam or the religion that the Bush-Negroes follow. But there cannot be much sympathy between the sophisticated Surinamers and the bush-dwellers. Neither the Negro English can replace the sophisticated and developed language. It would appear the n either that the solution to this problem has to be violent and extreme, or that there is no solution at all and perhaps no solution is necessary, and all that is required is a profound awareness that countries and cultures exist beyond the white mother country, beyond Europe and America. To create this awareness is
not easy. For just as Christianity is more fervently adhered to in Jamaica, say, than in London, so the provincialism of the mother country finds a more extreme expression in the West-Indian colony: to the respectable black West-Indian Italy is as foreign and ridiculous as Japan or Nigeria.”

It is actually the problem of the Negroes. Such a sense does not exist in Trinidad or British Guiana. It is mainly a cultural issue and the solution is improbable.

The language that the Negroes speak in Suriname is a very curious mixture of many languages. Though Suriname was free from the British rule as early as 1667, the Suriname dialects have many English words. Of course there is a variation in pronunciation and spellings. So the Dutch people are linguist as they are exposed to many languages-Dutch, English, French, Negreenglish, Hindi, Javanese-in everyday life.

Naipaul during his journey through the West-Indies often notes the laziness and lethargic nature of the Negroes. In Suriname he hears of the Negroes of Coronie, a Northern area, who are reputed as the ‘most lethargic people in the world’. He visits the province with one barman who knew the district well. He came to knew that the people here don’t do anything until it they have something to eat. If they don’t have anything they collect the coconuts and sell them to a nearby factory, which could never ran to its full capacity. They don’t sell the land to the outsiders except a Negro like them. They want to remain undisturbed by the outer world. However they allowed one Chinese to open a shop, and one Indian family to settle the re. He visits the house where he met an old couple. The man had faint memories of India, but knew nothing about India. Naipaul left Coronie in a dejected mood.

Naipaul analyses the relationship between past history and the efforts to build up nationhood as the main issue among the minds of the West Indian people. The situation in Suriname is perhaps the most paradoxical: “Nationalism in Suriname, feeding on no racial or economic resentments, is the profoundest anti-colonial movement in the West-Indies.”
MARTINIQUE

Martinique was a French colony in former days, but it was converted in a legally constituent department of France in 1946. Its area is 1146 sq.km and major population is the descendants of the former slaves-Creole Negroes along with the French who migrated from France and the Indians and Javanese people whose forefathers were indentured workers. The original natives of the island were the Caribs, not found now as they were killed by the colonizers or chased away to other islands or assimilated.

As soon as Naipaul lands the re, he notices that the island was a little France”; “Arriving from Trinidad, you feel that you have crossed not the Caribbean sea but the English Channel. The policemen are French. the street names in blue and white are French, the menus are French and written in French hand.”(22)

The French have succeeded to create a little France thousands kilometres far from Paris, and it was admired by many of the travellers including Trollop and Fermor. ‘It is a significant tribute to France’s management of her Empire, Leigh Fermor wrote in 1959, ‘that her distant territories should consider this (assimilation as departments into the metropole) to be the highest compliment and benefit they could receive.’(23)

But the colour prejudices in Martinique is perhaps the severest in its kind. There were riots which had killed people. Naipaul notes that the Martiniquans have a sharp sense of colour and they can tell how many percent white someone is. A majority of the population is with coloured skin, undistinguishable for an outsider, but for the natives they belong to certain groups by the shade of their skin.

“The Martiniquans all may be Frenchmen, but most of them only can be Simple Frenchmen outside Martinique.
Inside Martinique they are black Frenchmen or brown Frenchmen or white Frenchmen….Trinidad is more humane and allows people who reasonably look white to pass as white….a Martiniquan calls himself openly ‘a coloured’ because the whole island knows he is only fifteen sixteenth white.”(24)

Since the author was born and brought up in Trinidad he has been familiar to the racial prejudices in Trinidad, and hence he can easily compare the situations regarding various kinds of discriminations existing in Trinidad and the other islands.

“Living in Trinidad and then as an outsider in England, I had never before experienced the organized, single-standard society where sanctions could cripple; and in Martinique I felt choked. Prejudices have been imported wholesale from the metropole. I could never get used to hearing coloured Martiniquans say, just like Frenchmen of a certain type, ‘That damned Jew’s place is in the ghetto.” (25)

Naipaul observes that the racial tension in Martinique is more complex than that in Trinidad, Suriname or other place as the place is France. The French did not only brought in the civilization but also exported their social vices. They brought in their social structure, the hard social prejudices of the metropolitan bourgeoisie, which with the racial dimension created a unique organized society in Martinique. While comparing with Trinidadian society, Naipaul observes that here in Martinique money, education and coloured Frenchness matter but the Negro blood is still nothing but the reminder of the slave ancestry. But in Trinidad, such prejudices do not exist. The standards there are more diverse as the society is divided into many cliques. The racial prejudices are expressed in
the ballads sung by the school boys in the street, and can be traumatic for a Negro boy:

"the Whitman does call his woman Cherie;
the mulatto does call his woman dou-dou;
the Nigger does call his woman a stinking bitch.

Nigger ain’t have manners, for truth.
White man eating out of ware-plate;
Mulatto eating out of earthe n-ware;
Nigger eating out of calabash.
Nigger ain’t have manners, for truth(26)

Martinique is poor. The economy depends upon France. The island produces only sugar, rum and bananas, and everything else is imported from France. The strange thing is that the people don’t think of growing coconuts. They import the coconut oil from elsewhere. Even milk is supplied by France by a special plane. The rum produced by Martinique is of very high quality, and could be exported to other nations directly from Martinique. But no, it has to cross Atlantic first and supplied to anyone via Paris. This is done to benefit the middle-man, the commission man. In Martinique a commission man is a wealthy person. The poor industrial growth is mainly due to the petty politicians. They will not allow any new project in which they are not involved. No development is possible and a common Martiniquan thinks that Martinique would have lost if they were not associated with France. If anyone talks of industrial development and the start of the new project the typical Martiniquan reaction would be, as Naipaul writes: ‘The man is mad. Pay no attention -says another and so the bickering goes on and coconut oil is imported, and milk is flown in from France, from the Vosges, by the Air France milk plane’. (27)
The rural Martinique is feudal one. The white or the coloured are the masters, and they have many peasants, who wear straw hats. There are many fishermen near the coastal areas.

The strange thing about this island is that there is a community of white people, called Saintois, who are extremely poor. Naipaul was interested in their culture and read the account of the people living at the Isle of the Saints, south of the island of Guadeloupe. Patrick Leigh Fermor, in his travelogue ‘The Traveller’s Tree’ gives a detailed account of this race. He writes that these people have turned themselves into Negroes, except the colour. These saintois are happy in the jungle. They have long ago forgotten the French language. They now speak the Afro-Galish patios. They are more illiterate than the most illiterate Negroes on the island.

Naipaul was surprised when his friend Alexander Bertrand showed him a photograph of a Hindu chapel, because he did not know that there were many Indians in Martinique. Naipaul with a translator goes to the northern hilly areas to see the community. These Hindus were from the South India and were the descendants of the indentured workers. Though they were Catholic converts, they still worshipped Kali and performed a sacrificial ceremony once a year. It was the crudest form of Hinduism. The chapel was small rectangular concrete shed with corrugated-iron roof. The walls were painted in chocolate and ochre. The sacrifice of a sheep was done on a stone kept in the courtyard under a tree. A huge roughly carved idol of Kali Ma was there with a cutlass in her hand. There was a smell of stale tallow and oil inside. There were other small statues of a male, female and children. One of the Indians informed the author that they were a king, a queen and their children. But nobody knew who they were. There was no any sacred book inside. The people said that the ‘priest’ knew everything, and he was not available as he worked in a sugar factory. The other chapel had a statue of Virgin Mary, and carved by an Indian who claimed that the chapel was very famous.

The Indians in Martinique live in dire poverty and harsh conditions. Naipaul describes the features of an Indian man that betrays the conditions of the Indians. “….and a young Indian man, small and thin, with his hair in a fringed
below an old felt hat, tattered khaki shirt, a torn and dirty shirt, and black mud on his bare feet.”

The Indians are not the part of the mainstream of the nation. They are alienated, desolated and deserted by the remaining people. When Naipaul visited some of them, he was literally shocked to see the wretched condition in which they lived. “The white-mulatto-black world presented a common front of unaccommodating Frenchness; the Indian remained an outsider.”

JAMAICA

Naipaul leaves Martinique in a depressed mood, and arrives in Jamaica, the most beautiful island in West-Indies. The Island was a British colony since 1655 and got its freedom in 1962. Like the other Caribbean islands it has the majority of the Negroes, the descendants of the slaves. Many others have their ancestry in India, China, the middle East and England too.

This is the island which is full of natural beauty on the one hand and the filth and rubbish dumped by the people on the other hand. Naipaul describes:

“Wherever you look you see the surrounding Kingston hills, one of the beauties of the islands; freshening now into green after rain, blurred in the evening night, the folds as soft as those on animal’s skin. Against such a view lay a dead mule, its teeth bared, its belly swollen and taut. It had been there for two days; a broomstick had been playfully stuck in its anus.”

The history of this island is made of the most brutal incidents. The horrible atrocities against the slave have been recorded in the history of the island. This perhaps, as Naipaul believes, the cause of the movements like Ras Tafarianism. The followers of this movement developed their own psychology of survival. This is in fact a reply to rejection with rejection. These people will not cut or wash their hair. For this self-contempt they have their own logic and they think
that it has been sanctioned by Bible. Many of them are addicted to marijuana. They don’t vote, because they think that Jamaica is not their country, and they don’t recognize any government. They think that their country is Ethiopia, Africa. They think that the world in which they live, Babylon, is headed by Pope and the white, the brown and even yellow. Pope is the head of Ku-Klux-Klan. They don’t have any place in this Babylon. They have a wish to return to Ethiopia or Africa. They believe that English queen Elizabeth II is an incarnation of Elizabeth I, and eager to humiliate the black as slave. But the day is not far when the black will be emancipated, because God is black, and the Negroes are the chosen people, the Jews are imposters.

The movement is not organized and systematic. The followers are divided in many ideologies. The movement has its origin in the campaign ‘Back-to-Africa’, led by Marcus Garvey. The statement made by Garvey that the deliverance of the black will be at the time when a black king will be crowned. In 1930 Haile Silassie became the king of Ethiopia, and his photographs were in every house of the slum of Kingston. Ethiopia was now the promised land, and the King a messiah. But the irony is that, Naipaul notes, “The emperor was a brown man, and in his country there were still Negro slaves. This was unknown or disregarded.” [31]

This movement got the biggest boost in 1935 when Italy invaded Ethiopia. When the war was over one Italian, named Frederico Philos wrote an article stated that there is a secret organization, Niyabinghi made of nineteen million black people conspiring against the white people, and the King was the head. This excited the black in Jamaica and many groups were formed to fulfill the aims of the Niyabinghi-death to the white. This farcical looking theories and beliefs misled the black and turns to be grotesque tragedy for many who were attracted and hanged to death by law.
The naked truth about the economies of the Caribbean islands is that they are controlled and developed by the races other than the Negroes, as if the latter are not capable of running factories and industries and often and again the threat is pronounced that the black will starve if the white and the Chinese leave and return to their mother lands. This perhaps incites a fear in many and they respect the masters. But the scenario has been changing rapidly. Naipaul refers to an article published in the Jamaican newspaper ‘Sunday Gleaner’ written by a university student who is a Negro. This was in fact a reaction and reply to the statements done by one of the government man and a rich white fellow. The government resented against the increasing incident of the attack on the white tourist by the black people, and the rich white fellow declared that the Negroes will be in a pathetic condition if the white and Chinese leave the country. The article written by the student was in fact full of racial anger. He writes that the majority of the Island, the Negroes want to be ‘white’. The Negro ruler prefer the white as the developers. The Negroes don’t respect their own people. Their promiscuities and looseness of the Negro women have created havoc and degradation for the race. The writer urges to support the race first and the others. He is of the belief that the future will bring many changes. He wants promotion of education and skilled training for the race. The Negroes should develop the capacity for the independent actions and not depend upon government much.

This article, though straight forward, reveals the slave mentality of the majority of the Negroes in Jamaica.

Jamaica as a nation is a hope-less one. There are problems and no probable solutions. The debate and arguments are circular and directionless. The young generation who can be the pillars of the development are unable to use their talent to create a stable society. The pressures in Jamaica is not only issued from the racial tension and poverty, but they are the traits of colonial, slave, underdeveloped agricultural societies. The tragedy is aggravated by the leaders who don’t have any solution. Naipaul comments: “The situation required not a leader but a society which understood itself and had purpose and direction. It was only generating selfishness and a self-destructive rage.”(32)
Naipaul divides Jamaica into two. The first one is with expensive winter resort, white sands, reverential humble black servants, sunglassed figures below stripped umbrellas—which have been the scenes that could be seen on the ads of Jamaica tourism and television. But the other side is bleak. Naipaul notes:

“The slums of Kingston are beyond description. Even the cameras glamorize them, except from the shots taken from the air. Hovels of cardboards and canvas and tin lied choked together on damp rubbish dumps behind which the Sun sets in mocking splendour……Filth and rubbish are disgorged everywhere; these are puddles; and on the rubbish dumps latrines are forbidden by law.”

Naipaul ends his Caribbean journey at Jamaica. He is dejected to watch the plight of the people in these plantation islands. He finds the people alienated and frustrated. He sees the population growth as one of the major hurdles in the progress. Emigration is ceaseless. The farms are divided and sub-divided. The population crowds the slum. Education system crumbled under the pressure of too many children. Ignorance and superstition increase along with the racial pride. People don’t understand what a self-government is.

The critical reception for Naipaul was harsh from most of the West-Indian critics and writers. The notable thing in this regard is that the protest is not meticulous. It is more about his attitude than his views on the colonial and black societies. The general complain against his writings are his apathy towards the societies of the Negroes and other races. Naipaul thinks of those writers as great who write about their own society without empathy, hence he admires Wole Soyinka, but not the Nobel laureate Derek Walcott. Naipaul has very explicitly expressed the disgust he felt at the very sight of some of the Negroes. He feels nausea at some of the dirty habits of the Negro people, and the feeling is not hidden.
The Nobel laureate Derek Walcott admires Naipaul as the greatest among the living prose writers so far as the style and language is concerned. But he criticizes him bitterly for his repulsion towards the black. He calls him ‘V.S. Nightfall’ and the writer “scarred by scrofula”. His poem ‘At Last’ reflects his response to Naipaul’s attitude towards his own people.

You spit on your people,
Your people applaud,
Your former oppressors laurel you.
The thorns biting your forehead
Are contempt
Disguised as concern. (34)

Naipaul’s repulsion for the Negroes is obvious, and he does not hide it. He begins his book The Middle Passage with the following statement: “There was such a crowd of immigrant-type West Indians on the boat train platform at Waterloo that I was glad that I was travelling first class to the West-Indies.” (35)

Another critic Geoffrey Wheatcott blames Naipaul for his being racial and Pro-European:

“..on the basis of his being a Trinidadian, he has had ascribes to him the credentials of a man who can serve as witness for the third world; and he is a very convenient witness. He is a third worlder denouncing his own people, not because they are victims of imperialism, but because they seem to have an innate flaw that they are not whites.” (36)

Another critic Caryl Phillips repeats the same view that Naipaul is full of hostility to the Trinidadians. He refers to Naipaul’s statements that he had made in one of his radio talks in which he told that the Trinidadians live purely physical life, which is, to Naipaul, is contemptible. They are interesting people
for only those university students who want to do compassionate study about these people. It was quite natural that Naipaul would get only contempt and rejection from these people and the region that he has so bitterly attacked. Caryl Philips writes that though he spoke in one conference about the hostility Naipaul showed towards the Caribbean, the reaction of the audience there was not comprehensible: ‘I quickly understood. “Naipaul may be an ungenerous bastard, but he was their ungenerous bastard. Who the hell was I to talk about their son of the soil?’”(37)

Another critic from India expresses her anger for the bitter remarks by Naipaul on the Africans. Meena Kandasamy, writes:

“There is no limit to the highborn's high-handedness. His Aryan pride makes him one of the greatest racists of this century. His sneering contempt for the blacks had made the 1992 literature Nobel laureate Derek Walcott call him VS Nightfall in one of his poems. He has been known to criticize the Africans openly and he had once famously remarked 'Africa has no future'. Will Naipaul realize that this world has more than just black, brown, white and yellow? And the crazy melanin counts never determine who you are. Or do we need to write posters and take rallies and shout at the top of our husky voices, 'We belong to one race: the human race'?” (38)

It is right that Naipaul’s tone is harsh when he writes about the black people. He explicitly express his dislike for some of the habits of the black people. The critics from almost all over the third world blame Naipaul for his selling of the dirt and filth of the third world to the West. Some says his Western education shaped his mind against the colonized people. It is also said that he writes without sympathetic attitude. These critics perhaps ignore those accounts Naipaul had depicted about the brutality of the whites on the slaves and the Negroes. These accounts incites in anyone an intense loathing for the capitalism
and selfishness and cruelty of the white people. This should be noted that Naipaul’s books are full of such narrations, not sporadic. It seems that such critics who could not defend the allegations that Naipaul made on the third world people meticulously attack on him in a different way.

However no one can deny that Naipaul observes only the darker side of the third world societies, or he finds his material from the ebbs and errors of the people and completely ignores the brighter side. Though West-Indies has produced many outstanding people like Eric Williams, the Trinidadian prime minister, the social theorist CLR James and many Olympic gold medalist athletes like Arthur Wint and Herb Mckenley, Naipaul does not mention anything about them or dwells upon them as least as possible.

Yet no one can deny that his insight into the sub-culture of the people, the implicit mental attitudes, the frustration and hopes; his diagnosis of the present psychological status of the Caribbean people is extraordinary.
NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 34.
5. Ibid., p. 38.
6. Ibid., p. 40.
7. Ibid., p. 42.
8. Ibid., p. 36.
9. Ibid., p. 77.
10. Ibid., p. 98.
11. Ibid., p. 85.
12. Ibid., p. 98.
13. Ibid., p. 102.
15. Ibid., p. 116.
16. Ibid., p. 133.
17. Ibid., p. 191.
18. Ibid., p. 173.
19. Ibid., p. 175.
20. Ibid., p. 184.
22. Ibid., p. 199.
23. Ibid., p. 203.
24. Ibid., p. 204.
25. Ibid., p. 205.
27. Ibid., p. 207.
28. Ibid., p. 214.
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30. Ibid., p.225.
31. Ibid., p.226.
32. Ibid., p.234.
33. Ibid., p.224.
34. Derek Walcott, Sea Grapes, ‘At Last’
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36. Geoffrey Wheatcott, New York Times,
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37. Caryl Phillips ‘The Enigma of Denial: V. S. Naipaul's Negotiation of His
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38. Meena Kandasamy, Casteist. Communalist. Racist and Now, A Nobel Laureate,
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