Chapter V

*Among the Believers and Beyond Belief*

Islamic Excursions in Search of ‘Bloody Boarders’

Naipaul’s writings about the Muslim world and Islam have become a matter of great controversy, and are increasingly influential in mainstream Western Culture. His views on Islam have been very much in the circulation of the media ever since he wrote *Among The Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1981) and *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among The Converted Peoples* (1998), and they have come into sharp focus after he won the Noble Prize for literature in 2001. These controversial books concerning the effect of Islam on nations outside the Arab World were written as a result of two long journeys in Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia in a gap of sixteen years. They are Naipaul’s ‘literary excursions’ through Islam in which he ‘centres’ himself as an observer and tells the readers supposedly the ‘wrongs’ in Islam. The Western audience has been sensitised by Naipaul’s two books on Islam in which he turns culture as the major tool for determining authenticity of Islamic belief in these four countries. He carefully chooses stories of personal encounter and considers these as historic episodes to displace real history of Islam through the lives of such persons whose affiliation to Islam becomes the
subject of Naipaul’s irony. This is an excursion into a sight chosen carefully
to debunk what it stands for. Also, it acts as a testing ground for some of the
colossal anti-Islamic stereotypes of the Western mindset.

Naipaul has been acclaimed as a reputed writer in the West mainly for
his intense criticism of Islam and prejudices towards the Muslim
communities. He has enjoyed the reputation as an authority on the Muslim
world. However, many critics beyond the periphery of mainstream Western
culture have voiced concerns about Naipaul’s hatred of Islam. His inability
to restrain his loathing for the Islamic world and its people are well
articulated by critics like Eqbal Ahmad, Fawzia Mustafa, Caryl Phillips and
even Salman Rushdie. But the most prominent critic of Naipaul on this
issue is Edward Said who, after reading his books on Islam, held the view
that Naipaul had played into the minds of the Western readers and
consciously perpetuated stereotypes about Islam. In his book *Covering
Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest
of the World*, Said writes:

> V. S. Naipaul’s role in helping to clarify, this general hostility
towards Islam is an interesting one. In an interview published
in *Newsweek International* (August 18, 1980) he spoke
about a book he was writing on “Islam” and then volunteered
that “Muslim fundamentalism has no intellectual substance to it, therefore it must collapse”. What fundamentalism he was referring to specifically, and what sort of intellectual substance he had in mind he did not say; Iran was undoubtedly meant, but so too- in post war wave of Islamic anti-imperialism in the Third World for which Naipaul has developed a particularly intense antipathy as demonstrated in his *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*. (8)

For Naipaul and his readers Islam somehow is made to cover everything that one most disapproves of from the standpoint of civilized and Western rationality.

Said, following the ideas of Michael Foucault, emphasizes the relationship between power and knowledge in scholarly and popular thinking, especially regarding European views of the Islamic World. His argument that ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’ work as oppositional terms and the ‘Orient’ is constructed as the negative inversion of the Western culture gains momentum. Antonio Gramsci’s notion of cultural ‘hegemony’ also influences Said in understanding the pervasiveness of Orientalist representations in Western scholarship. It clearly shows that the colonizers
maintain their cultural dominance over the peripheries not only through the means of force but also through ideological imposition. There is the superior Western culture which has been contrasted with all the rest. A sharp divide is created between the West and the rest, with epistemological privilege always on the side of the West. There has been a process of exoticizing other cultures. Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing point out in *Key Concepts in Social and Cultural Anthropology* that the idea of the superiority of Western culture has become the potent yardstick through which anthropologists assess the accomplishments of other cultures. They elaborate this idea as follows:

Thus, we have science, they have magic; or we have history, they have myth; we have high-tech agriculture, they have subsistence practices; we have priests, they have shamans; or we have scientists, they have shamans; we have philosophy, they have believes; we are literate, they are illiterate; we have theatre, they have ritual; we have government, they have elders; we have rationality, they are pre-logical; we have individualism, they have community.(99)

So there is a politics of culture which endorses and legitimizes European colonialism.
Naipaul appears to have taken the view that Islam enjoys the benefits of a universal civilization while retreating from rationality into faith. He writes in Among the Believers: “The life that had come to Islam had not come from within. It had come from outside events and circumstances, the spread of the universal civilization” (398). He dismisses Islam as a ‘fearfully enraged and retarded dependent’ of the West which is ‘the world of knowledge, criticism, technical know-how and functioning institutions’, as remarked by Edward Said in his review of Beyond Belief. The book is permeated with the general feeling that “Islam sanctified rage-rage about faith, political rage” (354). It also tries to convey to the readers the impression that the Muslim societies all over the world are authoritarian, uncreative and hostile to the West. Written at the time of Islamic Revolution in Iran, the book betrays his violent antagonism against the religion.

The first chapter with a scary and degrading title ‘Death Pact’ reveals his ‘knowledge’ of Islam and Muslims and he puts it thus:

And it could be said that I had known Muslims all my life.

But I knew little of their religion. My own background was Hindu, and I grew up with the knowledge that Muslims,
though ancestrally of India and therefore like ourselves in many ways, were different. (15)

Naipaul further admits that the doctrine of Islam did not attract him and it did not seem worth inquiring into. And over the years, inspite of travel, he has added little to the knowledge he had gathered in his childhood. If Naipaul was not attracted by the doctrine of Islam and if it did not seem worth inquiring into, then why did he really venture to these Islamic nations and try to study the world’s most recent religion? He again speaks about his ignorance of Iranian affairs:

I hadn’t followed Iranian affairs closely; but it seemed to me going only by the graffiti of Iranians abroad, that religion had come late to Iranian protest. It was only when the revolution had started that I understood that it had a religious leader, who had been in exile for many years. (14)

Naipaul claims that Islam denies any history, previous to itself and comments that: “history has to serve theology” (134). He writes about the archaeological site of Mohenjodaro in the Indus Valley overrun by the Aryans and an article in a Pakistani Publication which suggested that the site should be engraved with verses from the Koran. What he wants to suggest to the readers is that Arab theology replaces local history which
leads to the loss of people’s sense of identity. He expresses his concern with history and says that: “it turns out now that the Arabs were the most successful imperialists of all time; since to be conquered by them (and then to be like them) is still, in the minds of the faithful, to be saved” (135).

Naipaul is seen pouring contempt on Islam’s failure to keep up with the spread of universal civilization. He argues that: “it was the late twentieth century- and not the faith- that could supply the answers- in institutions, legislation, economic systems” (399).

Naipaul tries to impart a general feeling which endorses the Orientalist belief that Islam is a coherent, transnational monolithic force that has been engaged in a unilinear confrontational relationship with the West. He talks of a fractured past solely in terms of Muslim invasions. An objective analysis on the East and Islamic countries reveals that he has derived knowledge in this subject from the imperialists of the West. He sounds like the eminent European psychologist H.W. Gilden who observes in an article in the February 1972 issue of American Journal of Psychology, that what is ‘aberrant’ for the West is ‘normal’ for the Arabs. He finds fault with the failures of nationalist guerillas and the fundamentalism of Islam, but never with the excesses of imperialism at the root of their motivation.
Mushirul Hasan, historian and Director General of the National Archives of India comments in *The Hindu*:

In most of the description, otherwise nicely woven into a coherent story, there is hardly any reference to the debilitating legacy of colonial rule. The civilized, innovative and technologically advanced West stands out as a vibrant symbol of progress and modernity, whereas the Muslim societies Naipaul encounters, despite their varying experiences and trajectories, are destructive, inert and resentful of the West. With Naipaul relegating colonialism and imperial subjugation of Muslim societies to the background, the West appears an open, generous and universal civilization. (8)

Naipaul becomes Western in spite of his odd personal displacement as a twice-baked colonial rooted in India but transplanted to the Caribbean Island. He finds no authenticity in the native worlds overrun by the Western colonials and makes western assumptions in the treatment of India and Indian Muslims. It seems that those who read Naipaul without a knowledge of Indian history will not understand that there lived a great ruler like Akbar
and there existed socio-philosophical movement like Sufism in India. The words of Dennis Walder about the history of European colonization and the dominance of the West over other cultures are quite relevant in this context. He writes about the defeat of Islam in Spain in 1492 leading to “the dispersal of a culture which, ironically enough had first brought the astronomy and mathematics upon which European navigational supremacy was based” (26). Walder continues and writes about the contribution of Akbar:

The trading ventures of Akbar, the great Mughal emperor of India, were on a much grander scale than those of his contemporary Elizabeth I of England, who granted a charter to what became known as the English East-India Company on 31 December, 1600. Indeed, not only was Akbar powerful than any other European monarch of the time, as soldier, politician, hunter, painter and booklover, he was the complete ‘renaissance man’ his court more splendid than any in the West. (26)

But Naipaul is pretending to be blind to such things which uphold the immense achievements of the great masters in the ‘periphery’. He views things through the lenses of Western civilization and his views and
comments are characteristic of the colonial writings of the European Imperialist leaders who wanted to subjugate the East with their knowledge of the Orientals. He makes sweeping generalisations apropos his views on Islam that all the Muslims in the world are fundamentalists and political Islam offers only rage and anarchy. Thus he puts it:

This late twentieth-century Islam appeared to raise political issues. But it had the flaw of its origins - the flaws that ran right through Islamic history: to the political issues it raised it offered no political or practical solution. It offered only the Prophet, who would settle everything but who had ceased to exist. This political Islam was rage, anarchy. (331)

There is a prosaic vendetta on Islam that finds its spot of blame in political Islam, meaning institutions of State that are based on faith. This juxtaposition between Islamic State and the faith of the people widens the dragnet of criticism. The most abominable in this plotting is a generalization of any kind of indigenous Islamic identity in a State inspired by Islamic faith. Naipaul, being an outside observer, gazes at Islam as more political than religious. The strategy he adopts is to constitute Islam as a substance for blame. He uses the technique of talking of some kind of inadequacy on the part of the ‘subject’ spoken of. Anouar Majid, the
Director of the Centre for Global Humanities, remarks in this context that:

“Naipaul, the homeless and wanderer, moves out from his oft-likened paradigm of an undefined place and undated time to be an advocate of hardcore Western rationality that functions only as a structure of an imperialist epistemology” (138). He is determined to find everywhere- in all the examples he cites and all the people he encounters- Islam vs. the West opposition that is very awesome and repetitive. He tries to compare his Western prejudice against the alternative, cultural, religious and political ideologies offered by Islam. Naipaul’s backlash on Islam has invited sharp criticism from different corners that his views and comments have no relevance and lack the basic idea of the Islamic faith. He seems to have made personal assumptions from a subjective reading.

Naipaul’s second book on Islam, *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples*, is a sequel to *Among the Believers* in which he records his revisit to the same countries- Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan and Malaysia- that are late converts to Islam. He travels among the converted people, the non-Arab people and speaks about the denial of their identity violation of their original forms of society and the ‘neurosis’ and ‘nihilism’ caused by conversion. They are presented as people caught in the postcolonial search for an identity. When he travels again after a long gap,
his views remain the same, but still more repetitive and replete with a lot more anti-Islamic feelings.

Naipaul in the Prologue-I presents the book as an informative factual text assuring the readers that: “this is a book about people. It is not a book of opinion” (xi). He promises the readers that the truth will be presented to them undistorted and he, as a writer, “will be less present, less of an inquirer”(xii). He adds that: “he is in the background, trusting to his instinct, a discoverer of people, a finder-out of stories”(xii). Naipaul makes a conscious effort to pretend to be detached in his observations and analysis and tries to guide the reader’s responses to the narrative by claiming total objectivity.

The central thesis of the book is that Islam in the non-Arab countries has a calamitous effect on the converted people and it is the most uncompromising kind of imperialism. If one is not an Arab Muslim, one cannot be an authentic Muslim. Naipaul has neither the patience of a social scientist to make a point after a consistent observation of his respondents, nor does he have the benevolence of an author who looks down at the oppressed from above. Instead, he assumes himself as the ‘other’ of those ‘neurotic’ and ‘nihilistic’ converted people. He denigrates the position of the converts in these nations and comments:
Islam is in its origins an Arab religion. Everyone not an Arab who is a Muslim is a convert. Islam is not simply a matter of conscience or private belief. It makes imperial demands. A convert’s world view alters. His holy places are in Arab land; his sacred language is Arabic. His idea of history alters. He rejects his own; he becomes, whether he likes it or not, a part of the Arab story. The convert has to turn away from everything that is his. (xi)

Naipaul claims that the converts are required to forget and reject their history and past and they become in spite of their likes and dislikes, a part of the Arab story. He comments that: “people develop fantasies about who and what they are; and in the Islam of converted countries there is an element of neurosis and nihilism”(xi). An intelligent reader may doubt whether the author is trying to impart an impression that neurosis, a tendency toward nihilism, self-delusion and aggression are the characteristics of these Muslims whose “countries can be easily set on the boil”(xi). A convert’s view is distorted and it produces disturbances. His arguments and stories substantiate his rage on anything that is Islamic. When Naipaul calls the Muslims in Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia and Malaysia converts to Islam since they are not from Arabia, will he call the Christians
and Jews converts because they are not from Jerusalem? Can he say that
European and American Christians and Jews suffer from a similar
‘neurosis’ because their ‘sacred places’ are abroad? ‘The Pakistani writer,
journalist and anti-war activist Eqbal Ahmad asks when interviewed by
David Barsamian:

Who is not a Convert? By Naipaul’s definition, if Iranians are
converted Muslims, then Americans are converted
Christians, the Japanese are converted Buddhists, and the
Chinese, large numbers of them are converted Buddhists as
well. Everybody is converted because at the beginning every
religion had only a few followers. Christianity, Buddhism,
Judaism, all prophetic religions developed through
conversions. In that sense, his organizing thesis should not
exclude anyone.(10)

Naipaul makes a generalisation to indicate that all the present non-Arab
Muslims representing about one billion out of a total 1.2 billion Muslims
in the world should be identified with the dubious term ‘converted’.

Eqbal Ahmad is equally critical of Naipaul’s earlier book on Islam and
expresses his disagreement with the treatment of Islam, saying that Naipaul
has written nearly sixty pages on Pakistan, given a picture of the country
quite far as an Islamic country under General Zia-Ul-Haq, and presented it as a government representing the country with the support of the whole people. Eqbal’s criticism is that Naipaul never reported or mentioned the great protests by hundreds of thousands of people, including all the reputed poets, writers and artists of Pakistan, against the state of affairs of the country under the General’s regime. He says that their best writers and poets of that period were in prison or in exile. Thirty thousand people had been flogged in public and nearly forty thousand imprisoned without trial. Yet that despotic regime has been portrayed as Islamic. Eqbal lashes at Naipaul in the following words:

And it is really rather scandalous. Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the greatest of poets, one of the two greatest of this century living in exile, Habib Jalib lived in prison. And in the 60 pages, a serious writer coming from London describes the regime of General Zia-Ul-Haq and the society he was creating without mentioning that we were all suffering in prisons or exile. This is not writing. He should stop writing. He should be selling sausages. (10)

Naipaul faces criticism from several other sensitive and discerning critics like William Dalrymple, Terry Egleton, Fowsia Musthafa,
Amin Malak etc. Malak in an article in *Modern Fiction Studies* observes that Naipaul’s major problem in the real understanding of Islam rests with his tendency to view individual failings as general failings of Islam. He often dwelt upon the cruel punishments meted out in the Islamic World, especially in Pakistan, but nowhere did he mention that it was practised by the government in power under military dictatorship at that time and it had nothing to do with the Faith. Malak says Naipaul has not chosen to visit and write about an Islamic country without a despotic rule. He observes in response to *Among the Believers*:

...two of the four countries: Pakistan and Indonesia- are under military dictatorship, the third (Iran) is undergoing a revolutionary process, and the fourth (Malaysia) is suffering from racial tension(.....). No wonder that his search for Islamic institutions or Islamic law in practice becomes an exercise in futility. It would be hard to imagine stable and legitimate social structures existing, let alone functioning in the political climates of the four countries visited. (565)

Malak in his very popular book *Muslim Narratives and The Discourse of English* looks into the Western posture that decides the parameters of the concepts of post-structuralism, postmodernism and postcolonialism, all of
which marginalize Islam as the ‘other’ of Europe. Malak obviously acknowledges the positive impact of these theoretical approaches in the field of criticism, and critical inquiry in transforming the way texts are read. But he keeps himself away from their exercise of “obfuscation to the detriment of concrete meaningful values” (16). There is an abstract speculation in these approaches that reinforces, and reproduces the uneven battle between the dispossessed, and the hegemonic powers, and Malak is seen disapproving of this approach, in his writings.

It is very significant that though Naipaul appears to target Islamic fundamentalism throughout his description, he frequently falls into a blanket denunciation of Islam which is presented as intolerant, blind and narrow. He observes that certain people or cultures are more vulnerable to Islam than others. In the section on Indonesia, he states that the Indonasiars are susceptible to conversion because “people have no idea of themselves and have no means of understanding or retrieving their past” (64). An impression is created that Islam can prosper in an environment where there is a vacuum of identity and the non-Arab Muslims, with their intricate mental make-up have become the living dead. To him, Islam demanded an abolition of the self and the converted peoples have to abandon their past
and it is the most uncompromising kind of imperialism. Thus he writes:

“Converted peoples have to strip themselves of their past; of converted peoples nothing is required but the purest faith (If such a thing can be arrived at), Islam, submission. It is the most uncompromising kind of imperialism” (64). He attributes all the ills and evils of these people to their Islamic origin and conveys a message that non-Arab Muslims are to be pitied because they have given away their souls.

Naipaul argues that a convert’s holy places are in Arab lands and his sacred language is Arabic. It is true; but it does not take away the convert’s love for his mother tongue, whether it be Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi etc. The holy Qur’an has been read in Urdu in India and Pakistan for decades. In Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Pasha allowed prayers be offered in Turkish. Does Naipaul find fault with the Jews since Jewish language is sacred to them? There was a time when the Bible was supposed to be sacrosanct in Greek only. This is the case with almost all religions, and not with Islam only.

Naipaul speaks about Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan and Iran and the way he generalises the issue has raised great commotion in the literary world. He argues that: “the fundamentalists wanted people to be transparent, pure, to be empty vessels for the faith” (290). He writes about the Jamaat-i-Islami, the most important fundamentalist group in Pakistan founded by a
religious teacher and zealot Maulana Maudoodi. He finds Islam a faith rigid in its basics which accepted violence as part of the Islamic agenda. It is true that Islam, at places, has fallen into the grip of fundamentalism and fanaticism. There have been incidents of provocations and unrest in countries like Iran, Sudan, Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan and Libya during the past three or four decades. Many attacks by Muslim suicide bombers and a number of plain hijackings mark this period. The killing of U.S. Marines in Lebanon 1983, the blast in the U.S. embassy in Beirut, 1988 explosion of Pan Am flight and the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Centre are only a few to mention. But it will be quite unjust to brand all Muslims as fundamentalists and fanatics. Nobody disagrees with Naipaul in his condemnatory remarks on Islamic fundamentalism and extremism but he is criticised for erasing the difference between the Islamic faith and Islamic fundamentalism. As Said has remarked in the introduction to Covering Islam: “Islam defines a relatively small proportion of what actually takes place in the Islamic world, which numbers a billion people, and includes dozens of countries, societies, traditions, languages, and of course, an infinite number of different experiences” (xvi). So the Orientalists active in the United States, Britain and other European countries have a trend to generalize the issues related to Islam and establish the idea that church and
state are really one in Islam. Said adds more: “The deliberately created associations between Islam and fundamentalism ensure that the average reader comes to see Islam and fundamentalism as essentially the same thing” (xvi).

Naipaul makes an assertion that Islam demand people abrogate their individuality. He seems to be silent on the truth that fundamentalism of any kind, whether Islamic or non-Islamic, is the mirror-image and product of Western Colonialism and neo-colonialism. Nowhere does he mention the political agenda of the West, especially the U.S, in promoting fundamentalism to safeguard their vested interests. The major Islamic groupings today are the allies of the U.S. The regimes of countries like Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Turkey are openly supported by the United States, and these countries witness emergence of militant Muslims to a considerable degree. They have been forced to accept the agenda fixed by the U.S and the West. The U.S defends itself as a global civilizational institution that decides the road map for all other, culturally different social groups. Naipaul never refers to Saudi Arabia’s Islamic government that appears to be more conservative and fierce in religious attitude than Pakistan or Iran. To quote again the words of Eqbal Ahmad from the same interview mentioned earlier:
Saudi Arabia’s Islamic government has been by far the most fundamentalist in the history of Islam until the Taliban came along. Even today, for example, women drive in Iran. They can’t drive in Saudi Arabia. Today men and women are working in offices together in Iran- In Saudi Arabia they can’t do that. Saudi Arabia is much worse than Iran, but it has been the ally of the U.S since 1932 and nobody has questioned it. But much more than that is involved. Through the Cold War, starting in 1945, the U.S saw militant Islam as a counterweight to communist parties of the Muslim World.(11)

*Beyond Belief* is more controversial a book on Islam as it regards Islam as an alien religion imposed on the peoples who are attributed to be Arabized by the ‘new fundamentalism’. Naipaul’s study on Islam in both the books seems to create the impression that Islam continues to be a worse colonizer than the West. He claims that the Muslim invasion stupefied India and other Third World nations while Imperialism made these nations part of the modern world and renewed their cultural and political scenario. He is criticised by Bill Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back* for not being part of the celebration of new national cultures and societies that came into
existence after political decolonisation. They elaborate that he is paradoxically drawn to the ‘centre’ even though he sees it constructing the ‘periphery’ as an area of “nothingness” (88). Thus he disappoints the Third World and the readers.

Naipaul’s analysis of Islam should be studied in the light of Samuel P. Huntington’s widely discussed theory of the ‘Clash of Civilization’ propagating the idea that people’s cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-cold war world and his argument that civilizational conflicts are prevalent between Muslims and non-Muslims. In his famous book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World-Order*, Huntington makes a classification of the different civilizations of the world and probes into the reasons for the clash of these civilizations. The major factors contributing to a Western-Islamic clash, he writes, are the Islamic Resurgence and demographic explosion in Islam, coupled with the values of Western Universalism that infuriate Islamic fundamentalists. He elucidates as follows:

Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, freemarkets, the separation of church and
state, often have little resonance on Islamic, confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist and Orthodox cultures. (40)

Huntington surveys the diverse theories about the nature of global politics in the post-Cold War period. He believes that while the age of ideology has ended, the world has started reverting to a normal state of affairs characterised by cultural conflict. In his text, he puts forward the theory that the primary axis of conflict in the future will be along cultural and religious lines. He posits that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and dominating source of conflict, according to him, will be cultural. The principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different global politics. He identifies the ‘bloody borders’ between Islamic and non-Islamic civilizations and the conflict between these civilizations. What both Naipaul and Huntington try to convince others is that the so-called ‘non-western cultures’ are congenitally benighted because they refuse to climb the magical bandwagon of ‘westomania’. The Western powers have an inclination to find a common enemy in Islam and Naipaul is often seen playing to their tune. Both his texts on Islam denigrate the followers of
Islam as violent, irrational, void and prey to a nihilistic form of neurosis.

Said has very aptly remarked in the introduction of *Covering Islam*:

> Malicious generalizations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the west; what is said about the Muslim mind, or character, or religion, or culture as a whole cannot now be said in mainstream discussions about Africans, Jews, other Orientals or Asians.

(XII)

Said has made an attack on Naipaul in a review of *Beyond Belief* titled ‘An Intellectual Catastrophe’ that appeared originally in Al-Ahram Weekly, August 1998. His contention is that the book is nothing beyond idiotic and insulting theory and he wonders “how could a man of such intelligence and gifts as V.S. Naipaul write so stupid and so boring a book, full of story after story illustrating the same primitive, rudimentary, unsatisfactory and reductive thesis, that most Muslims are converts and must suffer the same fate wherever they are” (41). He concludes his review with a more remarkable comment that Naipaul: “suffered a serious intellectual accident” (42). Establishing this point further, he adds:

> His obsession with Islam caused him somehow to stop thinking, to become instead a kind of mental suicide.
compelled to repeat the same formula over and over. This is
what I would call an intellectual catastrophe of the first
order.(42)

To conclude, Naipaul’s Islamic travelogues attempt to condemn Islam
as a savage religious system that tries to enslave other cultures. His
polemics seems to serve the Western intelligentsia who want to create a
cleavage between the Islamic world and the West. It is with a journalistic
point of view that he characterizes the Muslim world with deep-rooted
prejudice, misconceptions and Islamophobia. It seems that Naipaul is
making an effort to impart to his readers, his own assumptions and
knowledge about the world he visits. Authors and intellectuals like Rushdie,
Edward Said and Amitabh Ghosh have expressed their concern about the
ideological function that an extraordinarily brilliant writer like Naipaul is
performing in his ‘literary excursions’ through Islam. He considers
Muslims of the non-Arabic countries like Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia and
Iran as those who do not fall inside the Islam as known to the Orientalists
of the West. Rather they are annihilated in the totalizing theory of Islam
advocated by Naipaul and the Western Orientalists. An objective analysis
of the subject reveals that all his views and opinions on India, Africa,
Caribbean and the Islamic nations are derived from the source of
knowledge built by the West to rule and subjugate the Orientals as summed up by Said in the following words:

In a sense Orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspect, unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective. These ideas explained the behaviour of Orientals; they supplied Orientals with a mentality, a geneology, an atmosphere; most important, they allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as possessing regular characteristics. (42)

Naipaul seems to be a spectacular narrator of religious loyalties turned into instruments of collective subordination, as observed in Islamic states like Malaysia, Iran, Indonesia and Pakistan. He appears to have occupied the centre stage of Western speculation of the nature of Islam. There is a stereotyping of Islam that goes with the imperial arrogance as the Orientalist view denies non-Western civilisations their right to self determination.