Chapter I

On Naipaul
"I just feel that we're living in such an interesting world. One must capture all the interest of this period. I don't believe that the world has all been written about. The world is so new."
CHAPTER - I

ON NAIPAUL

Everything of value about me is in my books... I am the sum of my books. That was what I meant when I said that my background, the source and prompting of my work, was at once exceedingly simple and exceedingly complicated... And I think you will understand how complicated it was for me as a writer... I feel that at any stage of my literary career it could have been said that the last book contained all the other. (Two Words)

V. S. Naipaul’s award of the Nobel Prize for literature at the end of 2001 was long awaited. It was the only true culmination of a career dedicated solely to the world of letters. It was a coveted moment. V. S. Naipaul, a 63 year old man delivered the Nobel lecture, and gave the world an insight into himself, as a man and as a writer.

V. S. Naipaul’s works comes in the category of expatriate literature. Now, what exactly is expatriate literature? Expatriate Literature is literature written by persons living as aliens in a foreign country. War, modernism and new themes from Twentieth Century characterized literature of the twentieth century. A growing tendency in the post-World War-II Period is the emergence of expatriate literature. Advance of technology and novel modes of transport have created globalization and displacement. Migration and diaspora is common feature of the twentieth century; literature written by the expatriate depicting the predicament of
such people is a distinguishing feature of the twentieth century life. British
literature too has a large contribution from expatriate.

The word ‘patria’, which is of Latin origin, means ‘a country’ and it would
follow therefore, that an expatriate is one, who is expelled from ‘patria’ or it may
be a voluntary efforts determined by circumstances.

An expatriate emigrates to an alien country from his ‘patria’ for multiple
reasons-lure of money or other opportunities for education and employment,
religious persecution, political asylum, cultural perspective and motives or it may
be a combination or all these. An expatriate may live abroad without acquiring
citizenship there, like a resident alien, as Aldous Huxley did in U.S.A. An
expatriate, may still experience the social and cultural vacuum of an exile in spite
of acquiring citizenship in an alien country. V. S. Naipaul, who has lived in
England for 46 years, still belongs to this category. In spite of prolonged stay and
his marriage with an English lady, he is an “expatriate” and a feeling of
rootlessness persists with him. In several books of his, he has expressed these
do not cease to feel that this lack of interest is all wrong” (OB 16). He admits that
he lives there with a ‘Buddhist detachment’ unable to utilize his immediate
environment for a creative purpose. London remains his base, the land of his
physical stay but it is his journeys to various countries and to Trinidad and
Tobago, the land of his birth, which give him stuff for his creative work. The
journeys may be physical or imaginative and mental. An expatriate writer like
him has a dual existence; living as he does, simultaneously in two worlds; the one
to which he cannot and does not wish to return and the other, the land of his actual
stay, which he cannot or dare not leave. Expatriate literature is born out of the tension which is exerted between these two forces. Expatriate sensibility is generated out of such a dialogic juxtaposition. Dr. B Sudipta has to say a lot about this in her frequently read article "V. S. Naipaul and His ‘Magnificent Obsession with India’":

Deep within the being of an expatriate writer, the alienation syndrome ensnares them. The authors themselves are caught up in the east-west bound, enshrouded in a mist of alienation. The peripheral eastern influence and the profound western ambience has synthesized many a times into a body of confused philosophy, which results in existential crisis, both for the author and the targeted nation! (17)

Expatriate literature is characterized by descriptions of incessant travel, displacement and homelessness. At the heart of an expatriate is a growing restlessness which makes him launch on temporary journeys. ‘Plights’ and ‘escapes’ are common features in an expatriate’s life. The ship and the aeroplane constantly recur in expatriate literature. The expatriate finds in these modes a metaphor for a feeling of temporariness, rootlessness, nowhereness, and a state of constant mobility and expectancy. The idea of an escape or ‘Flight’ first came to Naipaul when he was a child and an extraordinary child; he wanted to escape from the creatively barren environment of Trinidad. Journeys for temporary visits, from Trinidad to London and from London to various countries, constitute Naipaul’s life. He travels to different countries, to the West Indies, India, Africa, Islamic countries and America and writes his travelogues. This has been a
common experience of several other writers from the Caribbean islands, who also emigrated to London.

The nature of the pattern of a travelogue is determined by the strength of the personality writing. A mediocre personality writing a travelogue would give us more of documentation and reportage and details of the ritual of traveling but a strong, rich, colourful personality with a tendency to turn inward and given to reflection and introspection will leave a more lively and enlightened travel book. The travelogue as a literary genre, therefore, has an unstable existence, hovering between the two poles of enquiry, anthropological, social or ethnographic and an autobiography of the writer. The travelogue today, therefore, has 'a polymorphic existence' and it has revealed its 'polymorphic' potential.

The breaking up of societies and the contemporary option of being able to choose one's society has made such a varied permutation and combination of experience and personal circumstances that writing has become an increasingly personal affair. It has found expression in sheer multiplicity of vision that are at odds with each other. This difference is most evident in the conflicting visions of diasporic and stay-at-home writers. Writers shape their world in their writing and are simultaneously shaped by the world they inhabit.

Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was born in 1932 in a small town in Trinidad into a family of Indian Brahmin origin. Naipaul's reminiscences of his early life in Trinidad and his efforts as a youth in London to make himself a writer recur throughout his work. Although, many of the details remain the same, this is not mere repetition. Naipaul recalls his days in Chaguanes' in his Nobel Lecture:
We lived on the Chaguans' land. Everyday in term time – I was just beginning to go to school – I walked from my grandmother's house – past the two or three main-road stores, the Chinese parlour, the jubilee theatre, and the high-smelling little Portuguese factory that made cheap blue soap and cheap yellow soap in long bars that were put out to dry and harden in the mornings – everyday I walked past these eternal –seeming things – to the Chaguanas Government School. Beyond the school was sugar-cane, estate land, going up to the land of Paria. (5)

His relations with people he meets in his travels affect the very nature of his memories and enlarge his perspectives on his heritage: the religion and customs of emigrants from colonial India who settled in colonial Trinidad. In his travel books, his *Prologue to an Autobiography*, and several of his novels, his return to his roots are part of a continuous narrative of commitment to his vocation as writer, a means of assuring himself that his readers are acquainted with “this man”, the author, where he comes from and where he is going. His father Seepersad Naipaul was a correspondent for the *Trinidad Guardian*. He also published short stories. His father together with his short stories and personal counsels were the major formative influences that left an indelible stamp on Naipaul’s mind. Lilian Feder records various examples of the interaction between the father and the son. One such example is quoted here: “During this absence from home he sent his son a little book of poetry in which he inscribed the child’s exact age: three years, ten months and fifteen days” and his counsel: “Live up to the estate of man, follow truth, be kind and gentle and trust God” (NT 29).
This gift, V. S. Naipaul later described, as “really a decorated keepsake”, constantly reminded him of his father’s devotion even in his absence. The counsel to a child not yet four, perhaps premature in a more conventional family, expresses ideals that even in his despair Seepersad Naipaul had not abandoned and wished to bestow on his son. One such incident occurred in 1933, which had to affect the future course of both father and son. Senior Naipaul wrote an article critical of the Hindu remedy for an outbreak of paralytic rabies among cattle – the sacrifice of a goat to the goddess Kali. In return he received an anonymous letter probably, says V. S. Naipaul, from a member of his wife’s family, threatening him with death unless he performed “the very ceremony he had criticized”.

Although his account of this threat in The Guardian had declared that he would not perform the sacrifice, in fear of death he complied, this created fearlessness in son also and he never hesitated while rendering truth. When Naipaul was six, the family moved to Port of Spain, the capital. By the time Naipaul was eleven, he and his father assumed that he was to be a writer. Fulfilling the ambition, Naipaul believed, entailed a good education and some lucrative scholarships. He achieved these goals by the age of eighteen, only to face a greater challenge – the unforeseen demands of his vocation. His father was indeed absent for long periods of his childhood. Their relationship was fundamental to Naipaul’s early development and his later career. Yet to the young man, becoming a writer meant breaking away from the limits of his past and the mutual dependence of father and son in this very endeavor. Naipaul’s explanation of the formal value of omitting the father in Miguel Street is no doubt valid, but creation is always over determined. Naipaul was educated at Queen’s Royal College, Port of Spain and in
1950 he won a scholarship to Oxford just at the age of eighteen. Seepersad Naipaul died of a heart attack in 1953 without witnessing the success of his son as a writer. He had encouraged Naipaul in his writing aspirations.

It would be better to have a glimpse of the life of a person who influenced V. S. Naipaul to a great extent, that is, his father, Seepersad Naipaul. Seepersad Naipaul’s father, a pundit, died when he was an infant, his mother’s tale of his cruelty oppressed him throughout his life. Left without resources after the father’s death, his family was divided among relatives whose decisions regarding the children seemed to have been determined by their age. Seepersad Naipaul, the youngest, was to be trained as pandit, and thus was able to learn both Hindi and English. Regarding his father’s stories and perceiving “the Brahmin standpoint from which they are written”, V.S. Naipaul speculates that it was the “Hindu reverence for learning and the word, awakened by the beginning of an English education and the Hindu religious training”, that instilled “the desire to be a writer” (Foreword, 8-13) in Seepersad Naipaul.

In one of his letters, Seepersad Naipaul told him “Don’t be scared of being an artist. D. H. Lawrence was an artist through and through; and, for the time being at any rate, you should think as Lawrence. Remember what he used to say, ‘Art for my sake’.” Naipaul, undeniably, followed such counsels for the rest of his life.

Naipaul often refers to the disadvantages of growing up in the colonial society of Trinidad shadowed by a mythicised ancestral part in India. But in the composite portrait of the writer that emerges from the body of his work, this point of departure at times seems a blessing. No doubt, his feelings of rootlessness, the
role of exile, resulted in personal insecurity as well as cultural instability, but it also produced an independence of spirit and a need to “extract the truth about all my varied life, culturally varied, geographically varied.” Naipaul wanted to cut himself off from his past. He hoped he would never have to “come back to Trinidad” (Letters 221), and if he did, he would “die from intellectual starvation” (298). But then, after writing his first book, Naipaul awoke to a new realization:

To become a writer, that noble thing, I had thought it necessary to leave. Actually to write, it was necessary to go back. It was the beginning of self-knowledge. (FC 40)

In The Enigma of Arrival, Naipaul has described his earliest attempts at being a writer. He has described how at the age of eighteen he had written a short piece called ‘The Gala Night’ based on metropolitan material. The “fracture” between the writing and the man that he described, surfaced many a times:

...the idea given me by my education... was that the writer was a person possessed of sensibility; that the writer was someone who recorded or displayed an inward development. To be that kind of writer (as I interpreted it) I had to be false; I had to pretend to be other than I was, other than what a man of my background could be. Concealing this colonial Hindu self below the writing personality, I did both my material and myself much damage.

(EOA 134)

Explaining to an interviewer his effort to “make a whole, an integrity”, by reporting or recreating an authentic version of his experience, he says, in his early writings, “my first four or five books (including books which perhaps people
Naipaul won many prizes during his reading – writing literary journey. Most of the books he had written won him prizes. But behind these prizes there was a great effort, will and determination, enthusiasm and hard work of a father and son. Since his childhood, V. S. Naipaul was given the dream to become a writer. Not only this, his father was working diligently to shape the mind of his son V. S. Naipaul, which was soft and like melted iron. Seepersad used to read paragraphs and pages for V. S. Naipaul, as Vidiadhar himself has mentioned in his Reading and Writing: A Personal Account:

Sometimes he would call me to listen to two or three or four pages, seldom more, of writing he particularly enjoyed. He read and explained with zest and it was easy for me to like what he liked. In this unlikely way – considering the background: the racially mixed colonial school, the Asian inwardness at home – I had begun to put together an English literary anthology of my own. (RAW 8)

V. S. Naipaul had a great impression of his father’s stories which was mainly based on Indian theme. Though V. S. Naipaul had never been to India before 1962 but he knew very well the history, culture, religious ceremony and so on. A House for Mr. Biswas (1961) is a proof of V. S. Naipaul’s acquaintance of Indian customs and traditions mentioned in the book. This writer has mentioned:

I wished to be a writer. But together with the wish there had come the knowledge that the literature that given me the wish came from another world, far away from our own. (RAW 9)
Naipaul has mentioned in many places that his father was a great help in reading and writing:

My private anthology, and my father's teaching, had given me a high idea of writing.... Certain undeniable things, though, had been added to my anthology during my time at the secondary school. The closest to me were my father's stories about the life of our community. I loved them as writing, as well as for the labor I had seen going into their making. They also anchored me in the world; without them I would have known nothing of our ancestry.

(RAW 17)

Like many great writers, V. S. Naipaul also delved deep into the reading of books. It seems easy to write anything that is worth reading but it is just inverse to have a writer's eye and idea to grab the reader's eye till the end. To judge the thing from all the sides, to evaluate the situation, to cover all the facets, the commonly found writer's minutest observation and so on is difficult to develop in a year or so. It's a long and gradual process through which V. S. Naipaul had to go and certainly he did so to achieve the place he is in now. In his own words:

I didn't feel competent as a reader until I was twenty five. I had by that time spent seven years in England, four of them at Oxford, and I had a little of the social knowledge that was necessary for an understanding of English and European fiction. I had also made myself a writer, and was able, therefore, to see writing from the other side. Until then I had read blindly, without judgment, not
really knowing how made-up stories were to be assessed. (RAW 18)

V. S. Naipaul, since his birth was brought up in the Indian culture and tradition, educated in the alienated atmosphere of Trinidad, one of the islands called West Indies till he departed for his further studies to Oxford where again he had to prove himself, with a dream to become a writer. He studied there on scholarship without knowing his real identity whether he belonged to India or to Trinidad. In such a situation to start writing was a difficult one, to prepare a plot, to name the characters (should the name be Indian, Trinidadian or English), to weave around the story what to do and how to start, these were questions unanswered, rather say problems, open-mouthed problems before V. S. Naipaul:

The book themselves I couldn’t enter on my own, I didn’t have the imaginative key. Such social knowledge as I had – a faint remembered village India and a mixed colonial world seen from the outside – didn’t help with the literature of the metropolis. I was two worlds away... I couldn’t truly call myself a reader. I had never had the capacity to lose myself in a book; like my father, I could read only in little bits. My school essays were not exceptional; they were only crammer’s work. In spite of my father’s example with his stories I had not begun to think in any concrete way about what I might write. Yet I continued to think of myself as a writer. (RAW 16)

Naipaul talks (in his Nobel lecture ‘Two worlds’) about the subject of his writing, the difficulty to find out the subject:
I have trusted to intuition. I did it at the beginning. I do it even now. I have no idea how things might turn out, where in my writing I might go next. I have trusted to my intuition to find the subject, and I have written intuitively. I have an idea when I start, I have a shape; but I will fully understand what I have written only after some years. (2)

French critic Sainte-Beuve says that if anybody wants to understand a writer and his style, one must go through the life of writer and his style. Naipaul quotes Saint Beuve in his Nobel lecture ‘Two Worlds’:

...to understand a writer it was necessary to know as much as possible about the exterior man, the details of his life. It is a beguiling method, using the man to illuminate the work. (1)

Naipaul quotes Proust in ‘Two Worlds’ when he says:

That a book is a product of a different self from the self we manifest in our habits, in our social life, in our vices. If we would try to understand that particular self, it is by searching our own bosoms, and trying to reconstruct it there, that we may arrive at it. (1)

Naipaul in his Nobel Lecture again quotes Proust to make it clearer: “In fact, it is the secretions of one’s innermost self written in solitude and for oneself alone that gives to the public”. (2)

There are ceremonies in India related to children, such as Upanayan Samskara or thread ceremony, Namkaran Samskara and many more. In Indian culture there is annaprasan ceremony also. In Bengalis they do one more thing: to
predict the future path in life. They offer a plate holding a ballpoint pen, a rupee note, and soil, to see if the baby will be a landowner or a scholar or a business man. Every parent in India, in other countries also, thinks about the future of the child, they try to fix the destiny of their child; but, as the baby grows the circumstances change and according to it the destiny also changes. Parents as well as the child compromise with the circumstances. Naipaul also faced the same situation. His father had given him the dream. His father’s words and Naipaul’s vow ‘commitment to deliver the truth’ were not easy to follow. If he were in job, he would never have become a writer. He was not getting any money from anywhere, so he continued to write and followed the path of becoming a writer. In his own words:

If I had had even a little money, or the prospects of a fair job, it would have been easy then to let the writing ideas drop. I saw it now only as a fantasy born out of childhood, worry and ignorance, and it had become a burden. But there was no money. I had to hold on to the idea. (RAW 24)

When he was six, the family moved to Trinidad’s capital, Port of Spain, the setting of his first novel, Miguel Street (1959). It was a migration: from the Hindu and Indian countryside to the white – Negro “mulatto town”, where the family held itself apart. “In a ritualized society”, says Naipaul, “their world is enclosed by rituals: they hardly know where they are. They are not like other people who wish to adapt.”

Naipaul shows that he is observant and records small details minutely. His memory is excellent, and can be seen in the following lines:
My grandmother’s house in Chaguanas was in two parts. The front part, of bricks and plaster, was painted white. It was like a kind of Indian house, with a grand balustraded terrace on the upper floor, and a prayer room on the floor above that. It was ambitious in its decorative detail, with lotus capital on pillars, and sculptures of Hindu deities, all done by people working only from a memory of things in India. (Two Worlds 6)

Naipaul’s father transmitted his unfulfilled writing ambitions to his son, a ‘fantasy of nobility’, along with a ‘hysteria’, a fear of extinction... a panic about failing to be what I should be, as Naipaul wrote in his essay Reading and Writing (2000). His father’s failure helped make Naipaul aware that Trinidad could not support a literary career. In the Foreword to his father’s book, The Adventures of Gurudeva (1976), he wrote that talent was not enough “in a society as deformed as ours”.

Naipaul went to Oxford on scholarship to study further. After four years he migrated from Oxford to London. He started anchoring a program for BBC, and there he met Patricia Hale. Naipaul married Patricia Hale in 1953. Though she was always his first reader, he later described their marriage as “incomplete”. During it he confessed “he was a prostitute man... the most unsatisfying form of sex”. Then in the early 1970s he formed a passionate relationship with an Anglo-Argentine woman, Margaret, which lasted until his second marriage. His mistress often traveled with him while his wife remained in their Wiltshire home.

In ‘Hindu Samskara’, there is a samskara named ‘Garbhadhan Samskara’ in which the bridegroom is supposed to transfer his seeds into the bride at a
particular time to beget a bright and intelligent child. There is great importance given to having children in every religion and every country. India has fixed its target to be in the line of developed country till 2020. Yet Indian people have the narrow minded tendency of looking down with contempt at people who do not have children. Here V. S, Naipaul’s whimsical nature is indigestible. There are lots of examples of persons having children, even great personalities, freedom fighters, inventors and Nobel laureates. But Naipaul’s whimsical nature is evident proof when he says – “children would have come between me and the work.” He has also said: “I love privacy. I could not bear the idea of having children. I don’t want a crowd.” (Wikipedia)

Naipaul was frustrated with every thing that was Indian viz: rituals, religion, dress, ceremonies and even his very face and personality which constantly and unremittingly reminded him of his true origin and ancestors. In 1949 after having some pictures of himself taken for his application to the university, Naipaul wrote to his elder sister:

I never knew my face was fat. The picture said so. I looked Asiatic on the paper and thought that an Indian from India could look no more Indian than I did ... I had hoped to send up a striking intellectual pose to the university people... (FC 13)

After a nervous breakdown, he tried to commit suicide but luckily the gas meter ran out. After the death of his first wife Patricia Hale in 1996, Naipaul married Nadira Alvi, a divorced Pakistani journalist, twenty five years younger to Naipaul, whom he had met in 1995 at the home of the American Counsel General in Lahore. An article on the Internet reads like this:
He was 63 and she a good 20 years younger. Now they were sitting next to each other like a couple of teenage lovers in the bar of the Bombay brasserie, his favorite restaurant in London (He eats only fish, daal, vegetables, no meat). He was clearly smitten and their talk seemed straight out of a Mills & Boon romance. (Wikipedia)

Nadira, Lady Naipaul is the wife of Nobel Prize winning novelist Sir Vidiadhar Naipaul. She was born in Pakistan and raised in Kenya. She worked as a journalist for the Pakistani newspaper, The Nation for ten years before meeting her husband. They married in 1996, two months after the death of Sir Vidi’s first wife. This was her second marriage. She has two kids from an earlier marriage, Maliha and Nadir. Nadira Alvi reorganized his life, throwing out old socks, old books, old friends (including, it seems, Paul Theroux). “I think we fell terribly in love”, Nadira said of her meeting with Naipaul. “He was my soul mate. I am madly in love with him. I think I shall always be madly in love with him”.

(Wikipedia)

Naipaul had started his career as a freelance writer after graduation. During this period Naipaul felt himself rootless but found his voice as a writer in the mid 1950s when he started to examine his Trinidadian background. From 1954 to 1956 Naipaul was a broadcaster for the BBC’s Caribbean Voices, and between the year 1957 and 1961 he was a regular fiction reviewer in the New Statesman. Naipaul published his first book in the late 1950s but they did not make much money for him on, for his publisher, Andre Deutch Ltd. However he knew his value as a writer and refused to write a review for The Times Literary Supplement for their usual fee. Naipaul’s novel The Mystic Masseur (1957) about
a bright young man, who dreams of becoming a famous writer was adopted for
the screen by Ismail Merchant. Miguel Street (1959) was a farewell to Port of
Spain, Trinidad. The colorful characters of the sketches include Bogart, who got
his name from the film Casablanca, B. Wordsworth who sells his poetry for 4
cents and Man - man who is a real mystery to the people of Miguel Street. The
narrator is a boy who grows up, starts to earn his own money and finally goes
abroad to study. "I left them all and walked briskly towards the aero plane, not
looking back, looking only at my shadow before me, a dancing dwarf on the
tarmac." (NT 26)

Naipaul again returned to his father in Between Father and Son (1999) a
record of their correspondence in the early 1950s.

In 1960, Naipaul received a grant from the Trinidad government to travel
in the Caribbean. His first non-fiction was The Middle Passage (1962) in which
he described his first revisiting of the West - Indies. Since then Naipaul traveled
extensively in India, South America, Africa, Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and the
USA and produced an entire gamut of non - fiction. It would be better to have a
look at his works chronologically with short reviews:

The Mystic Masseur (1957) was the first book of Naipaul. This book won
him John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial prize. The story traces the incredible life of
Ganesh Ramsumair in the pre-WWII days in a sleepy village in Trinidad. In the
span of 207 pages, Ganesh goes from a failed schoolteacher to writer, village
masseur, mystic, entrepreneur and finally, a politician. If the story sounds
unbelievable in summary, Naipaul makes it extremely ordinary and utterly
believable with large doses of humor and wonderful descriptions. With sharp
observations and sly wit, Naipaul takes us into the home of the reclusive Ganesh who lives in a modest house surrounded by over one thousand books, in a one-tree village where nothing of interest ever happens. Ganesh, with his "everything happens for the best" attitude is a simple protagonist. Even as we are made aware of Ganesh’s incompetence, we are drawn into the story and begin rooting for him when his first book called "101 questions and answers on the Hindu religion" which he writes by copying from other books, turns out to be a failure.

The Suffrage of Elvira(1958) is a short book, and the subject matter is fairly commonplace - the book is about an election. The Suffrage of Elvira, is a novel based on an election that occurs in rural Trinidad. However, Naipaul is such a master of constructing personalities that the subject becomes completely fascinating and the lives of the characters that populate the story are as involving as the plot. All his characters - Harbans, Chitaranjan, Baksh, and the town of Elvira - are developed with amazing natural grace and, as always, Naipaul's conversational style is engaging from start to finish. The story itself is consistent with themes he previously explores: provincialism, tragedy, self-consciousness, and how the individual finds his place in the world.

The Miguel Street(1959) won him Somerset Maugham Award. “A stranger could drive through Miguel Street and just say ‘Slum!’ because he could see no more.” But to its residents this derelict corner of Trinidad’s capital is a complete world, where everybody is quite different from everybody else. There is Popo the carpenter, who neglects his livelihood to build “the thing without a name.” There is Man-man, who goes from running for public office to staging his own crucifixion, and the dreaded Big Foot, the bully with glass tear ducts. There
is the lovely Mrs. Hereira, in thrall to her monstrous husband. In this tender, funny early novel, V. S. Naipaul renders their lives (and the legends their neighbors construct around them) with Dickensian nerve and Chekhovian compassion.

Set during World War II and narrated by an unnamed—but precociously observant—neighborhood boy, Miguel Street is a work of mercurial mood shifts, by turns sweetly melancholy and anarchically funny. It overflows with life on every page.

In 1961 appeared A House for Mr. Biswas often regarded as his masterpiece. The protagonist, Mohun Biswas, was partly modeled after the author’s father. The tale itself is sanguine and endearing about a simple Indian man who seeks his own home in Trinidad. The text is imaginatively laced with brilliant comedy and rich irony. Home ownership for Mohun Biswas is always just beyond his grasp or temporary in its occupation or destroyed by man or nature. While he conducts his search and finds the means to own his house, he is enslaved to the will of others offering him shelter. Life invariably confounds him in his inability to impose his will to shape his own destiny. His stint as a newspaper reporter for The Sentinel, the search for oil, the river drowning, the tempest, his journalism series on the ‘Deserving Destitutes’ and the construction of his home on Sikkim Street were tragic-comic gems. Naipaul’s ear for dialogue always rang true. Educated at Oxford, Naipaul stayed close to home on this tale: his father wrote for a newspaper in Trinidad. The characters appear to be extensions of his family (his father and sister) or himself at various stages in his life.
In *The Middle Passage* (1962), Naipaul describes the effects of British, French, and Dutch colonialism on the history and culture of the Caribbean. Naipaul based his observations on a seven-month tour of the area, a grant from the government in Trinidad.

In 1960, the government of Trinidad invited V. S. Naipaul to revisit his native country and record his impressions. In this classic of modern travel writing, he has created a deft and remarkably prescient portrait of Trinidad, and four adjacent Caribbean societies; countries haunted by the legacies of slavery and colonialism and so thoroughly defined by the norms of Empire that they can scarcely believe that the Empire is ending.

*Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion* (1963) won him the Howthordon Prize. *Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion* is set in London and follows the schemes of a disappointed Englishman of the suburbs who creates an order of the ‘Knights Companion’ as a way to benefit the workers and ex-employees of his company. The novel lives in and satirizes that dreary 1960’s milieu of the middle-class company worker, his desire and wish for magic and escape from the drudgery and soul-deadening mass of English petit bourgeois life.

In the year 1964, Naipaul published a book by the name, *An Area of Darkness*. *An Area of Darkness* details the experiences of author V.S. Naipaul in India between February 1962 and February 1964, of his travails there with the locals, his discoveries about the people of India, and his coming to terms of what is India and what it means to be Indian. The themes of the first four chapters can be summarized in the words poverty, caste, defecation, and failure. Opinionated
and brilliant, as most of Naipaul's writing, it is not a balanced portrait of India in the early 1960s.

The Mimic Men is a wonderful discourse on the post-colonial search for identity by the Nobel-prize winning Naipaul. Growing up between two worlds, those of the colonizer and of the colonized, the main character struggles to develop a cohesive self as a child, attempting to reconcile western values and beliefs with his traditional Hindu background.

Naipaul’s next book The Loss of El Dorado was published in the year 1969. The Loss of El Dorado, examined the early history of Trinidad in the light of the surrounding world affairs.

In a Free State won him England's Booker prize in 1971. It comprised of two novellas, the short-story that is the book's title and a prologue and epilogue which are in the narrator's voice and describe impressions from his travel journal. Besides exploring the theme of alienation, the common thread that connects these stories is the search for what it is that causes the destructive impulses that lie deep within us to rise to the surface. The trials of the character continue through adulthood as he returns to his native Caribbean island with a new English wife, earns a status as one of the island's elite, and attempts to become one with his past as he helps incite rebellion on the island against colonial forces.

In 1975, Naipaul’s Guerrillas was published. This is a horrible story, one of many that Naipaul has written. However, he usually covers political or social violence, with its chilling though unpredictable inevitability, as a portrait of a local culture. In Guerrillas, he follows the descent of a single sick individual, who covers his insanity with revolutionary rhetoric from another society that of
American blacks of the 1960s. Though the rhetoric does not apply to Trinidad, the underdeveloped society lacks the structures to question it and he is allowed to continue his "activism."

India: A Wounded Civilization originally published in 1975, is a vivid and unsentimental cultural portrait. It draws together conversations with Indians; news reports; politics and literature, paying particular attention to the Hindu confrontation with the West.

His central theme is the vibrant, pulsating, intellectual Hindu civilization which has been dominated for too long-first, and longest, by the Muslim invaders and second, more recently, by the English. After the initial burst of optimism following independence, India has faced one obstacle after another, turning inward, revealing a 'wounded civilization,' a stilted culture which does not know herself anymore; nor what made her great.

Naipaul's A Bend in the River (1979) is almost as much reportage as fiction. The novel is set in the city of Kisangani, on the Congo River in Congo (formerly the Zaire river in Zaire) -- though interestingly, the author never says this explicitly. The protagonist is a young Indian from the Eastern coast. ("Indian" in the sense of his ethnicity, his family has been in Africa longer than they can remember.) He has purchased a shop in Kisangani, and tries to build up his business as the "big man". He consolidates power in the newly independent country. Things go from bad to worse, for the new shopkeeper and the country.

Though this is fiction, every word is true. Naipaul writes beautifully, and has many insights into Africa, colonialism, history, and life.
Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey (1981) is a non-fiction work by Naipaul. The celebrated novelist V. S. Naipaul began his "Islamic journey" in Teheran in the late summer of 1979, eight months after the fall of the Shah and the concomitant enthronement of the Ayatollah Khomeini as de facto ruler of Iran. There, in his conversations with local Muslims, mostly of the younger generation, he encountered the same intellectual and emotional confusions he had met among their Iranian and Pakistani counterparts. The novel is very dark and grim with a sense of doom and gloom permeating the lives of all the characters.

A Turn in the South was published in 1989. In this work, parts of which originally appeared in The New Yorker, noted essayist and novelist Naipaul travels the American South in an attempt to explore and explain this unique region. Stopping at places as diverse as Atlanta and rural Mississippi, Naipaul develops contacts and sources which span race, class, and sex. He admits that at the start of his journey he had no central theme. And, indeed, at the end, no clear "mind" of the South emerges. Rather, the South seems infinitely varied in outlook and attitude, vaguely unified only by a common past that tends to emphasize a sense of order, reverence for "the land," and intense religious faith. A Million Mutinies Now (1990) is again a non-fiction on India. The book was written around 1990 and is a snapshot of India at that time. The million mutinies title refers to the theme of the book - of the many struggles for identity of various groups in modern India. The book is non-fiction although obviously the names of interviewees are changed. Another point is that as a snapshot of India in 1990 it is perfect, however a lot of things have happened since then: Rise of the BJP, India going nuclear, the end of Sikh terrorism, the outsourcing boom, privatization and
deregulation, which make some of the observations in the book seem dated (e.g. at one point he writes about the single domestic internal airline, while nowadays there are more than a handful).

A Way in the World, a collection of essays by V. S. Naipaul, published in 1994, travels around the Caribbean, dealing with the battles between the Spanish and British to colonize Trinidad and Venezuela. The theme of the novel consists of several portraits of flawed men who lived and experienced Trinidad. There is the radical black revolutionary Lebrun who is highly intelligent and has many acute things to say about the narrator's writing, yet ends as an apologist for the Soviet Union and for various African tyrannies. There is a long chapter on Sir Walter Raleigh's futile attempt to find El Dorado, with a discussion of the lies and brutalities he committed in a futile attempt to save his neck from an ungrateful English government. There is an even longer one on General Miranda, who attempted to free Latin America from the Spanish. The pictures of Raleigh and especially Miranda are damning. Yet in all these pictures there is something more than condemnation. It is not quite compassion, not quite mercy, in the way that Naipaul agrees that there is something more, something worthy in their lives. It appears to be the truth.

Naipaul's book, the ironically titled Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples, is dedicated to his Muslim wife, the well-known Pakistani journalist Nadira Alvi. Subtitled "Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples," Beyond Belief follows up on his acclaimed 1981 publication, Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey. Both books feature extensive
interviews in Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Many of the interviewees in
the two books are the same, contributing continuity and deeper insights into
Islamic fundamentalism. Naipaul's thesis in Beyond Belief is: There probably has
been no imperialism like that of Islam and the Arabs....Islam seeks as an article of
the faith to erase the past; the believers in the end honor Arabia alone, they have
nothing to return to. In the Indian context, Naipaul views Islam as far more
disruptive than the British rule.

Letters between Father and Son (1999) records his letters to his father and
vice-versa. Writing to his eldest son, Vidia, at Oxford in 1950, Seepersad Naipaul
observed: "Your letters are charming in their spontaneity. If you could write me
letters about things and people-especially people-at Oxford, I could compile them
in a book." Nearly 50 years later, the father's desire has been fulfilled by his son
with the publication of V.S. Naipaul's Letters Between a Father and Son. The
collection covers the period between Naipaul's departure from his native Trinidad
in 1950 to study at Oxford to the untimely death of his father in 1953 at the age of
47. Alongside the letters between father and son are those between Naipaul and
his older sister, Kamla, a student at the Banaras Hindu University in India, who is
advised by her then-17-year-old brother to "watch your personal effects carefully;
the Indians are a thieving lot."

Half a Life (2001) is the story of the progress of a man from a loveless
beginning to a solitary end that may turn out not to be a true end, just a plateau of
rest and recuperation. "The experiences that mark his progress are sexual in
nature. Half a Life does not give the impression of having been carefully worked

*Half a Life* is, mainly the story of Willie Somerset Chandran. It is an odd tale, moving from India to England to Africa, and it is oddly told. The novel begins with an omniscient narrator, but after half a page Naipaul switches to the first person, allowing Willie's father to recount the story of the origins of Willie's unlikely name, as well as his own pathetic, misled life. As the chapter ends, this story completed, Naipaul switches back to an omniscient narrator. Near the end of the novel, Naipaul again allows one of the characters (Willie himself this time) to tell his own tale, jumping back to the first person and, again, back in time.

*The Writer and the World* (2002) is an impressive if odd collection of V. S. Naipaul's non-fiction. It includes essays written between 1962 and 1992. Over 500 pages worth, the book is divided into three sections. The first and shortest four pieces covering just 70 pages is on "India". Then follows "Africa and the Diaspora", much of it centered on the Caribbean region. Finally, there are "American Occasions".

This, in a nutshell, is an attempt to chart out the works of V. S. Naipaul with slight reference of his father's influence on his mind set. Besides his father's direct counsels there were his stories also which influenced and shaped the literary potential of this Nobel Laureate. The boy Naipaul read his father's early articles as "Memorials of a Heroic Time I had Missed". His father read to him Charles Kingsley's *Story of Perseus*, chapters from Dickens's novels, stories by O' Henry, and when he was only ten Joseph Conrad's *The Lagoon*. Naipaul tells of his lasting response to the atmosphere "of night and solitude and doom", his
father also engaged him in the process of his story writing in *The Guardian* and *Gurudeva*. The boy listened to the stories as they were created in version after version, and was asked for and gave advice. He observed his father’s efforts to depict the Hindu village life of his childhood. In his “Prologue to an Autobiography”, he tells of his participation in the creation of a long story, *Gurudeva*, “its slow making from the beginning to the end...it was the greatest imaginative experience of my childhood.”

Seepersad Naipaul’s stories are a vital portion of his heritage to his son who considers them “a unique record of the life of the Indian or Hindu community in Trinidad in the first fifty years of the country.” Besides this Naipaul was also learning, from these stories, a great deal of the writer’s craft. His father’s stories, he says, gave him “a way of looking, an example of labor, a knowledge of literary process, a sense of the order and special reality (at once simpler and sharper than life) that a written words could be seen to create.” Before he could apprehend the context of the message, he had received his counsel to ‘follow truth’. Much later, in a letter to his son, written in 1951, Seepersad Naipaul had recalled his editor’s advice “write sympathetically”, and had added his own, “and this suppose, in no way prevents us from writing truthfully, even brightly. V. S. Naipaul definitely follows the preaching of Senior Naipaul but he totally lacks the sympathetic view for his motherland. Even then, Naipaul deserves the praise for his presentation of bare truths. When asked in an interview about Naipaul, Khushwant Singh asserts:

> Among contemporary writers, I rate V. S. Naipaul the best. What he depicts and delineates in his novels, *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilization* and *India: A Million Mutinies Now*
affirm that he lacks love for India. As in An Area of Darkness, Naipaul has dismissed the spectacular scene at Suraj Kund in just four words but dealt in great detail with the grimy village children. Similarly, he did not describe the saffron fields in Kashmir or even give a passing reference to the autumn crocuses in bloom. Instead, he has given greater details on Kashmiri women raising their long phiran to defecate. Thus, Naipaul seemed to have an obsession with filth and squalor. Can a true Indian do this?

(The Quest, June 2007)

In so far as he could, he adhered to the principle, that he would render truth, reveal reality, without thinking of the bitterness. Seepersad Naipaul had taught him to be rigid with this principle. The very disparities that characterize his style render his fidelity to the truth of his observations: the contraposition of an epic tone with wit and satire, the remnants of a ceremonial heritage and the pleasures of quotidian existence juxtaposed against the details of its poverty, ignorance, deceit and cruelty. His precise observations and an honest rendition of it are evident in his non-fiction.

In an inclusive sense, fiction is any literary narrative whether in prose or in verse which is imagined rather than being about real events. In a narrower sense, however, fiction denotes only narratives that are written in prose, and sometimes used simply as a synonym for the novel. By systematic contrast, non-fiction is directly concerned with the rendition of actual events, real people and presently existing places. The new Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol.8 defines non-fiction as a "story of actual people, actual events told with the dramatic techniques of the
novel.” From the aforementioned source we also come to know that Truman
Capote is considered to be the father of and founder of this recent offshoot on the
basis of his book, *In Cold Blood*. In its next phase of evolution, Norman Mailer’s
*The Executioner’s Song* (1929) takes this newly born babe non-fiction a step
further. This non-fiction novel uses a variety of novelistic techniques to give a
graphic rendering of recent characters and happenings, and is based not only on
historical records but often on personal interviews with the chief agents. But
neither the encyclopedia nor any glossary to literary terms include or refers to V.
S. Naipaul as its practitioner. It is so because his works are not non-fiction novels
but simply non-fiction. Now we have to explore and understand completely what
is this non-fiction in particular and how Naipaul has contributed in its
establishment as an independent and mature genre.

In the passing years of the fifth decade of the twentieth century, or to say
in the postcolonial era, non-fiction means a form of writing where “the writer
may use the fiction, writer’s techniques of plotting, suspense, dramatic conflict,
character development, but he may not go beyond the facts he is able to dig out.
These stories must present a conclusion, a point of view, the conclusion must be
reached in the scientific method only after all available evidence has been
weighed and after as much bias and prejudice as is humanly possible has been
ruled out. Thus the ideal of journalistic objectivity is part of and vital to the
process.

Clay Felker and Tom Wolfe, Editor of the *New York* magazine considered
it as ‘the new journalism’. Tom Wolfe says that the new non-fiction was
pioneered by *Esquire*, under editors Hayes and Felker in the early 1960’s.
Proceedings in the further analysis of the salient characteristics of this non-fiction, Wolfe calls it a ‘saturation reporting’; in it the reporter spends weeks, months, or year(s) with the subject of his story so that he can observe first-hand the action which reveals the man’s character, the words which reveal motivation. Moreover, it is grounded almost equally in journalism and what the English academicians call creative writing. From journalism it takes the reporter’s aggressive and constant search for fact, his accuracy, his sensitive trained observer’s eyes, his skepticism and adeptness at checking and cross-checking the things he is told against documents, other spokesman, experts and original sources.

From creative or fiction writer it takes imagination, skill at plotting and portraying character, the techniques of building a dramatic story, of evoking the reader’s emotions and most importantly, the impositions of the writer’s individual judgment on the story. In his book on creative writing, Paul Engel says, creative writing means ‘quite simply writing to which something new has been added’. Now the simple question is how this novelty about something can be obtained? Professor Cathy Covert of Syracuse University is aptly quoted here. Who says, “Creativity is taking a bit of knowledge from this discipline, an insight from another, an experience one has lived, assimilating them into one’s mind, going through a process of complete chaos and ultimately coming up with something quite new.” This is more or less a ricochet, a romance of illustrious Eliotian doctrine of objective poetry which he expounds through a scientific analogy. The poet’s experiences of a particular phenomenon and his emotions and insights
about them merge in the presence of a catalyst, in his own mind, and produce a new thing or idea which has not even the least trace of the catalyst.

It is exactly so in this newly born non-fiction, the non-fiction artist goes behind the facts to get the truth. He spends a long span of time about his subject. He makes himself an expert, a savant by reading and interviewing the experts. He relates what he learns to the problems and worries and interest and yearnings of the people.

A perfect non-fiction artist must confirm to whom he intends to write. He must go for the idea that will affect the largest number of writers. In this respect, an interesting remark made by Sumner Blossom, the editor of an American magazine is worth quoting – “I would rather have story on noses than on red hair. Because more people have noses than red hair.” (R&W 22) The difference between amateur and professional writers is that the amateur writes for himself and the later writes for his readers. It is only for the lurid taste of his readers that he adds the spice of crime, sex, sports, society, culture, customs, and manners in harmonious proportions. One may not suspect the assimilation of sex and crime in non-fiction writing. The writer sharply observes the sexual habits and belief of a particular culture or region and then passes his comments on it. Not abiding to one’s usual custom in any front of life is crime in its narrow sense. People are primarily instinctively and intuitively, interested in themselves – their problems, the things they do every day, their hobbies, their relations with other people. A non-fiction artist understands it well and gives men and women what they instinctively hunt for. Research has been a succour for non-fiction writing. Research is called legwork and it consists of going where something happens,
looking acutely, listening accurately, questioning participants and ultimately
giving this information a coherent and organic garb. In their book The Reporter’s
Trade, Washington columnist Joseph & Stewart Alsop remark, “If you get out and
see for yourself what’s going on and talk to a great many people who are
responsively involved in what’s going on, you can hardly help doing a good job
of reporting.” (58)

Non-fiction also depends on interviewing. The art of interviewing can be
broken down into two parts: how do you get to see the man, and how do you get
him to tell the things making your story pertinent, lively, readable. For being an
interviewer par excellence, one must make his art, lively and challenging. He
must make his object feel important about it and let the man know he is listening
to him: it flatters him and makes him try harder. Having done all his work, the
non-fiction artist comes to the evaluation of his raw material. He summons to
his mind the huge mass of facts, figures, statistics, expert opinions, conflicting
viewpoints, anecdotes, tangential information, the motives and emotions of the
character and tries to make a judgment about where the truth lies. The evaluation
also helps the writer in giving an organization to his work. The heart of the
organizing process is, to first refine the single theme or idea that the facts indicate.
Everything in the piece viz – anecdotes, interviews, reportage, individual
judgment, should support the author’s point of view.

V. S. Naipaul once described his purpose as an author as nothing less than
a “commitment to deliver the truth”. And certainly fiction from any angle is a
slippery and unreliable vehicle that always can not keep itself abreast of truth.
Naipaul was, thus, bound to consider other media and foresaw non-fiction as the
most compatible and conducive form for his objective and he made this form certainly his own as he created some special characteristics of this non-fiction. More or less what has been enumerated in the earlier pages can be applied to the non-fiction writing of Sir V. S. Naipaul also. But Naipaul seems to assert a certain distinction by having some entirely new features which differentiate him from his few predecessors. This may be directly or indirectly because of the lurking fear of each original and creative writer as propounded by Harold Bloom in his *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973). It is the same fear and anxiety which weaned away Keats from completing his *Hyperion*. Naipaul’s non-fiction compositions undergo several phases of research, interviewing and evaluations. Evaluation not only of the facts he collects but also of the already established judgments. For instance in the very beginning of *An Area of Darkness* he talks about one of the mega hits of Indian cinema (Dosti), “a funeral dirge” or a “blind man’s lament could become a hit. They delighted in decay”. Whether only source of delight of an Indian is decay or something else is a matter of a long debate and will come later, here the remarkable thing is Naipaul’s inadequate judgment about a film which was largely celebrated by Indians. Naipaul’s non-fiction starts with the inception and shaping of the idea for the story, it takes the readers through the research process, the evaluation of the evidence, the organization, and the method of presentation. This shows us clearly a beautiful fusion of non-fiction and fictional techniques. In his writing, firstly facts and evidence are presented to readers followed by his individual judgment imbued with impeccable dramaturgy. In other words first the factual property of a non-fiction artist comes and then a view or judgment in the novelist’s voice. But while giving judgment the artist
should not go too far and allow his bias to override the facts. Naipaul uses specific
details while portraying things. He learns intuitively that what makes a story
fresh, new and colorful is the detailed account of things. He dares not leave even
the least particle of any construction. A non-fiction artist should be precise and
with Naipaul the art of precision reaches its apogee. Seldom does the reader fail in
getting the intended idea or figure of something depicted. This precision is often
altered by his use of connotations. Even the simplest words trigger different
pictures or impressions in different people's mind. Psychologists, who give word
association tests, see this everyday. The word 'color', for example, will make
many men think 'red', women think 'black' or 'blue', negroes think 'black' and
'white'. This is the dimension of the writer's problem; he must use these
connotations to get his meaning implanted in the reader's mind. In her book,
*Saying What One Means*, Freya Stark says:

> Words dress over thought and should fit; not only in their
> utterances, but in their implications, their sequences and their
> silences, just as in architecture the empty spaces are as important
> as those that are filled. The problem of all the writing is the same
> as that presented by the composition of a telegram, one has to
> convey a meaning with the use of few or inadequate words.... The
> whole generalship of writing is in the summoning and marshalling
> of those unseen auxiliaries. (51)

It is the exuberant use of connotations which make his non-fiction
operates at two levels. He tells one story but does it in such a way that it seems to
be telling another. One is manipulated, the second is tacit.
Ultimately, but not least crucial, Naipaulian non-fiction writing is teeming with his adept dramatic writing technique. Naipaul had the realization that totally objective, factual and uninvolved representation will leave the reader, neither stirred, nor agitated. Such writing will be purely a reporter’s news. Dramatic writing is crucial for keeping non-fiction vital and interesting. Even being dramatic it remains objective because the writer takes no position, pleads no cause and it is factual, only the way of presentation is changed. Flashback technique is his frequently used weapon in making his writing dramatic. Everybody knows the essence of dramatic writing is conflict. The deep, ancient conflicts are few and simple; man against nature, man against man, man against himself. The adept writer, like Naipaul, always tries to evoke either primordial fear or joy – lurking in the “collective unconsciousness”. The first type of conflict, yielding fear is missing in Naipaul’s writing. The conflict of man against man lies behind many stories – social, political, economical, sport etcetera in which men battle other men for power and position. This conflict is recurrently presented in Naipaul’s writing.

Naipaul’s non-fiction is beautifully interwoven with historical, political, and geographical matrix without inclining to anyone in particular. He explores history for tracing the root of particular phenomena, at time for substantiating his judgment and for showing the contradiction between past and present. He includes all the topographical, geographical aspects of a particular nation. Politics, naturally, comes in his non-fiction since much of life is determined and directed by the political authorities of the country.
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