Chapter II

Naipaul’s Perspective on History and Civilization
"I travel to discover other states of mind."
CHAPTER II

NAIPaul'S PERSPECTIVE ON HISTORY AND CIVILIZATION

A discourse, coming from renowned literati especially from a non-fictional writer, demands an extra, disinterested and intellectual explication. Since the facts, which are preserved in such non-fictional works, cannot be easily evaded as they stand for reality and cannot be considered as the writer's imaginative venture. Although Naipaul's work, fictional and otherwise, is a serious, some might say almost compulsive engagement with "history", extracting any coherent view of history out of his corpus is fraught with difficulty. His argument depends so much upon the force of his words, and the dramatic contexts from which they emerge, that to redescribe them is always to risk caricature. Nevertheless in his colossal world with infinite discrepancy in its physical, geographical, cultural, linguistic and even in the intellectual matrix one final judgment is fragile to appease the general mass. As it is, there are as many schools of thought as there are different cultures. So as a civilization, a culture or a country, which attracts one, might concomitantly distract others. One may under the aura of its effect, exaggerate the beauty and goodness of a particular civilization, but another may disparage it.

A civilization consists not only men and women, but also their beliefs, customs, assumptions, living style, manners and achievements in literature, science, art, polity, economic development and so on. All these ingredients of culture and civilization are manipulated around the infancy and boyhood of that civilization. With the passage of time, change is likely to come. In the Indian context, changes have come but these new changes are unable to entirely suppress
the old. Consequently the old and the new vistas, the old and the new traditions and fashions enjoy a parallel movement. Psychology tells us that the impressions, which are erected on the psyche of a child are difficult to be deleted at an advanced stage. Similarly the beliefs and assumptions even practices, which have been coming down to us since time immemorial are too hard and fast to be broken. They are now engraved deep in our blood, in our spirit and in our ‘collective consciousness and unconsciousness’.

Now what might be utilitarian and significant in the past may lose its utility and potential in the present. So a reshuffle and modification of laws, both oral and written, are supposed to appear intermittently. These modifications, now individual and then collective, cannot annihilate the older ones completely. It happens with all civilizations and so with India. In India, it is more conspicuous. Since the Indian civilization is one of the oldest, there are many more paradoxes and contradictory ideologies in its civilization. Although there is a professed unity in all its diversity, but the reality is indeed different from the professed and apparent one. Naipaul has dexterously brought out these inexplicable and unreasonable disputes on Indian civilization and history. For Naipaul, whose great achievement was to bring to light, in the words of the Nobel citation, “suppressed histories”, forgotten historical complexes, which sediment into our psyche and distort us. If there is one such complex that Naipaul seems to consistently dislike, it is historical amnesia. He is only an outsider, and can see only the external and physical facets and cannot grasp the inner and deeper integration. Somehow these inner discrepancies are stronger. At times his judgment is partly correct, but at time it is incomplete, vague and indecipherable. It is so because his knowledge of
India is incomplete and his Indianness is unique. His constant and recurrent visits to India have acquainted him only with the physical part of India and he remains unacquainted with the inner richness of India. All that Naipaul attempts to do is to find a reasonable link or relevant meaning between the primary assumptions behind any social custom and its modernized, modified or at sometimes its distorted social manifestations. The actual and relevant purposes and intentions, (which were conceived long ago by the sages and seers) of different rituals, ceremonies and practices have desisted long ago. It is Naipaul's limitation that he does not stop to explore how and why every ritual and ceremony has undergone a gradual change, not only in its social manifestations but also in its assumed purpose and intention. We can observe here his comments and judgment on some of the oldest and most practiced samskaras. For instance let us probe into one short paragraph from his first book on India, An Area of Darkness:

I had no belief; I disliked religious rituals; and I had the sense of the ridiculous. I refused to go through the janaywa, or thread ceremony of the newborn with some of my cousins. The ceremony ends with the initiate, his head shaved, his thread new and obvious, taking up his staff and bundle – as he might have done in an Indian village two thousand years ago and announcing his intention of going to Kasi – Banaras to study. His mother weeps and begs him not to go; the initiate insists that he must; the senior member of the family is summoned to plead with the initiate, who at length yields and lays down his staff and bundle. It was a pleasing piece of theatre. But I knew that we were in Trinidad, an island separated
by only ten miles from the South American coast and that the appearance in a port of Spain street of my cousin, perhaps of no great academic attainment in the garb of a Hindu mendicant scholar bound for Banaras would have attracted unwelcome attention. So I refused: though now this ancient drama absurdly surviving in a Trinidad yard, seems to me touching and attractive.

(AAD 34)

Naipaul asserts that he had a sense of the ridiculous for this thread ceremony. As he has described this ceremony, it is likely to produce this sense of the ridiculous. Each ritual of this thread ceremony is real and meaningful. The thread ceremony symbolizes the second birth of the child. The second birth is supposed to end the impure life that had gone before. The removing of hair symbolizes the removal of guilt and impurity. The concerned boy takes the pledge of Brahmacharya and goes for education to a gurukul where he lives the life of a mendicant. This was what happened in the past. But with the passage of time, human life changed, consequently his needs changed. Now the kind of education given to him in the archaic gurukuls could no more aid him and make him survive in the modern world. Although much of the syntactic structure of this thread ceremony is in existence and much of the semantic value is extinct now, this ceremony has managed to persist. 'Old habits die hard', says Salman Rushdie in his legendry Midnight's Children and thread ceremony is still much more than a habit. It is part and parcel of Indian culture and life. Indians hardly let any of their beliefs and customs die. Indifferent to the distorted form and meaning of this thread ceremony, they show their complete faith in every religious ritual. Instead
of appreciating this faith, Naipaul has restricted himself only to watch over all this as a part of a ‘theatre’ that is ‘touching and attractive’. Naipaul seems to carry with him all the layers of history he can decipher: his Indian roots, his Trinidadian inflections, his anglophilia, and even his cosmopolitanism. It is writing of loss and of anger, of unsettling confrontations, and confident certainties. It seems that Naipaul has, on the one hand, a keen eye for the displaced and the unrealized that opens him up to other worlds; on the other hand, one notices that openness is belied by his sense of futility about most people he writes about.

One of the paradoxes that is preponderant in Naipaul’s non-fiction is a strange kind of dilemma; he is always in a fix. He has not given a clear impression to his readers whether he is content with tradition or with modernism. It is very tough to decide whether he is anti-tradition or pro-tradition. This fix is evidently remarkable in the ensuing paragraph from the same book:

I had rejected tradition; yet how can I explain my feeling of outrage when I heard that in Bombay they used candles and electric bulbs for the Diwali festival, and not the rustic clay lamps, of immemorial design, which in Trinidad we still used? I had been born an unbeliever. Yet the thought of the decay of the old customs and reverences saddened me when the boy whispered ‘Real Brahmin’. (AAD 36)

Naipaul’s honesty is praiseworthy and keeps him always away from hypocrisy, but when this non-believer, a great disinterested writer, an uncompromising man feels dejected at the decay of old customs, how can an
average Indian go away from the practices and customs which are in vogue since time immemorial? Naipaul satirizes it in a sardonic tone,

Customs are to be maintained because they are felt to be ancient.

This is continuity enough; it doesn't need to be supported by a cultivation of the past and the old, however hallowed, be it a Gupta image or a string bed, is to be used until it can be used no more.

(AAD 30)

Nevertheless, paradox is not only a part of Naipaul and other great writers but it is a part of every human being, every human civilization, every society and culture. India is a country teeming with paradoxes and only an outsider like Naipaul can point it out easily, mercilessly and at times humorously. Indian authors are generally either silent about such drawbacks or they disown these paradoxes. Their imagination abide only by beauty, imaginative or real, and by ideology. They never seek the practices of ideology in day-to-day life. How brilliantly Naipaul asserts:

The prompting is universal, but the Indian practice is purely of India. ‘And do thy duty, even if it be humble, rather than another’s, even if it be great. To die in one’s duty is life; to live in another’s is death.’ This is the Gita, preaching degree fifteen hundred years before Shakespeare’s Ulysses, preaching it today. And the man who makes the dingy bed in the hotel room will be affronted if he is asked to sweep the gritty floor. ‘The clerk will not bring you a glass of water even if you faint. The architecture student will consider it a degradation to make drawings, to be a mere
draughtsman. And Ramnath, the stenographer, so designated on the triangular block of wood that stands on his desk will refuse to type out what he has taken down in shorthand. (AAD 47)

The Gita insists on duty, the right one, the right one means what one has to do at critical moments one must do it. For instance, the battlefield is not a proper place for preaching, but Lord Krishna himself has done so, when Arjuna was saddened to see his own relatives in the battlefield. Only the duty is to be performed without considering the result. Indians worship the Gita, they kowtow it, even take oaths of it in their judiciary but they are so obsessed with the false sense of stratification and hierarchy that one feels affronted at transcending one’s allotted duty. So the clerk will not bring a glass of water and the stenographer will not type a letter. This is the worst thing and is common in Indian offices and society. Naipaul has approached it rightly, but it cannot be applied to all and sundry. There is also a different side to the Indian psyche. Naipaul does not approach that side. All great personalities have devoted their life to the reformation of such tendencies. It is again a paradox with Indians. They worship and kowtow to their leaders, but they hardly try to learn something from their imitable life. Every Indian gives his due respect to Gandhiji but the number of his true followers can be counted on fingers. We can concede that Naipaul presents a true picture, but a misbalanced one. Naipaul feels there is a kind of cultural shock. It is the same experience felt by Tejaswini Niranjane. She has talked about it in an interview given to Gouri Ramnarayan in THE HINDU, Sunday, March 6, 2005

I was disturbed to be claimed by some Trinidadian Indians who wanted to mobilize me against the Africans. My book began there,
why couldn’t I recognize them as Indians? It is because they are part of what India had to cast out in order to become what we are? 

...... I began to argue that what we are in India depends very heavily on what we have discovered? (The Hindu)

Naipaul’s perception of Islam and the various aspects of Islamic society, his views and opinions on major issues as expressed in the course of his journey through the four Islamic countries – namely Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia are recorded in his book entitled Among the Believers with a subtitle “An Islamic Journey” published in 1981. But before proceeding in this probe one thing should be cleared, Beyond Belief is not taken here in consideration because, as Naipaul himself asserts, it deals with the Muslims who have converted their faith and are living the distorted facet of Islam. The arch motto of Naipaul’s excursion to the Islamic countries was his professed desire that is “to see Islam in action”. He explicitly expresses “I had come to find out about this application of Islam to institutions, to government, to law.”

In Pakistan, Naipaul searches, in vain, for rational answers, to questions such as the administration of justice; the rules of the land; tenure and solutions to problems of economic development in the Islamic state. What he finds, to his astonishment, is public floggings and newspaper articles, criticizing the mass transit systems for not availing enough buses for carrying people to attend the flogging; martial law; and an economy where the major industry is the export of people who go abroad to England, Canada and the United States from where they can send money home, or ‘remittance economy’ as the author calls it. Nevertheless wherever a desert is, oases are not at length. He meets people,
memorable people like Masood and Nusrat who help him in forming a clear and disinterested vision.

Neither Naipaul nor the natives of Indonesia can make sense of the massacres of more than two million people around 1965. Here again the urge towards Islamic purification is energized by emotions so deep and needs so obscure that one is inclined simply to avert the eyes, with awe, before the spectacle. Naipaul as usual, though he is as confused as anyone, will not avert his tired eyes. He looks; he asks questions and represents the full richness of his own confusions.

Naipaul longs for a unitary Islam in its pure sense among the Muslims in these countries. He makes a search for the essential core of Islamic faith and he also aims at making a first hand study of the application of Islamic law and tenets in the life and institutions of the Muslims. Md. Akhtar J Khan in his book *V. S. Naipaul: A Critical Study* rejects Naipaul’s assertions as inauthentic and denies Naipaul’s choice of three or four countries as true Islamic countries. He questions Naipaul for not making any visit to the African or Arabic world from where Islam originated. Mr. Khan clearly writes:

Thus during the time of his visit, two countries, Pakistan and Indonesia are under military rules and the third country Iran is undergoing a revolutionary period and the fourth that is Malaysia is suffering from racial tension. Obviously no historian or journalist or traveler can get a correct picture of democratic norms in countries which are either under dictatorship or passing through revolutionary process... (76)
Again to find a unitary Islam is wrong because Islam is not a single culture but a collection of cultures. Islam may be one faith but it covers a variety of cultures, spanning a large geographical area. As such the people of a country have accepted Islam in the context of their own geographical, cultural, political and regional characteristics, which have colored the faith through their own distinct ethos and environment. One has to have a deep and sound knowledge of the Islamic tenets in order to find unity among all its diversities. One can never find a unitary Islam by visiting only four countries and by observing people only as an external agent. Thus Naipaul is bound to fail and he has failed. Naipaul puts forth in Among the Believers:

This late 20th century Islam appeared to raise political issues but it had the flaw of its origins – the flaw that run right through Islamic history, to the political issue it raised, it offered no political or practical solutions. It offered only the faith. It offered only the prophets who would settle everything but who have ceased to exist. This political Islam was rage, anarchy. (46)

This late 20th century Islam evidently means that Naipaul considers that Islam has been changed, from century to century. Islam indeed has not changed nor it could ever be as far as the essence of Islamic faith and tenets is concerned. Only the social and physical manifestations can alter in accordance to vicissitudes. Secondly, Naipaul is wrong when he says that Islam had the flaw of its origin, for not offering the solution to political issues. Islam covers almost all the aspects of a man's life, social, cultural, political and religious. Political issues are to be judged and solved from one and the same point of view that is Shariat.
Naipaul's next statement that the prophet had ceased to exist is wrong. To a Muslim this amounts to blasphemy, for spiritually the prophet is always there and every Muslim can always derive the same spiritual solace and even guidance that the companions of the holy prophet derived from him. In the final line Naipaul makes a sweeping conclusion that "this political Islam was rage, anarchy."

Obviously he makes these comments with regard to a particular society in a particular land and to apply this situation to the entire realm of Islam is nothing but a sweeping generalization.

However the most critical and ironical statement against Islam is the following:

It seemed to me that the deduction might work against them, because the message they were going to take to the world was extraordinary, a divinely inspired prophet, arbitrary rules, a pilgrimage to a certain stone, a month of fasting. (63)

Here by referring to the Haj pilgrimage that a Muslim makes to Mecca as a 'pilgrimage to a certain stone' and to Ramdan as a month of fasting, Naipaul certainly makes himself appear as a man completely ignorant of the history, the spiritual significance and scientific reasons of fasting to a Muslim.

Naipaul does make certain valid points regarding the drawbacks of the Muslims in his criticism about the failing of Islamic fundamentalism. The rigidity and vagueness of fundamentalists in Pakistan are his target:

The fundamentalists, insecure, with their unhistorical view, feared alien contamination but fundamentalism offered nothing. It pushed men to an unappeasable faith; it offered a political desert. It
violated the basics; it could never wall out the rest of the world.
And I thought it was possible, looking not many steps ahead, to see
how in Pakistan by the very excesses of fundamentalism, Islam
might be preparing its own transformation. (AB 56)

In the very beginning of the book Naipaul seems to ridicule the purdah
system of Muslims:

Another evening an Iranian woman came on with her head covered
to tell us that Islam protected women and gave them dignity.
Fourteen hundred years ago in Arabia, she said, girl children were
buried alive, it was Islam that put a stop to that. Well we didn’t all
live in Arabia, and many things had happened since the 7th
century. Did women still need the special protection that Islam gives them?
Did they need the veil? Did they need to be banned from pubic life
and from appearing on television? (AB 57)

Naipaul’s vision of civilization differs from the existing reality. It renders
an honest personal picture of world civilization. Nevertheless it must be asserted
that it is almost impossible to rely completely on Naipaul’s judgment. One single
man, of whatever strength, cannot access many different cultures and all their
lineaments. He has a lot of information, through personal interviews and books.
His consistent and constant sojourns have acquainted him to the external and
existing layers of life today, so he speaks of it without taking the inner integrated
matrix into consideration.

Naipaul does not approve of the recorded views on civilization. He has
his own vision of civilization and corroborates it wherever he feels necessary.
Similarly his vision of history also revolts against the traditional one. In the post structural era, every important discipline has undergone a considerable change. It is so with history. As a fiction writer, Naipaul could have played with history. But with his non-fiction certainly he has to abide with restrictions. He is aware of the changed discipline of history and the new approaches that the historians are using. He conceives of history not as a record of linear progression of established truth but simply as a discourse, which is constructed with mutual consents, now reliable and then unreliable. Thus there is always a probability of recreating history. Yet only recorded history could support his self-made verdicts. Naipaul has an extremely laudable ability of recreating history. In his Nobel lecture Naipaul says,

I was thirty-four when I found out about the name of my birthplace. I was living in London, had been living in England for sixteen years. I was writing my ninth book. This was a history of Trinidad, a human history, trying to recreate people and their stories. I used to go to the British Museum to read the Spanish documents about the region. (3)

Naipaul’s own conviction is apt and should be quoted here. On having being asked what history is, Naipaul replied in an interview that history is “interplay of various peoples and it has gone on forever. I can think of no culture that has been let to itself.” This absolutely matches with Naipaul’s practiced strategy in his non-fiction. History is created largely through the individuals whose role Naipaul reconstructs from letters and documents they produced or appeared in. The theme that emerges from this material is the disparity between the heroic images history
has imposed on the protagonist, or they themselves conceived, and the greed, the lust for fame and power, especially the illusions, the evasions and deceits their ambitions entailed. We have innumerable instances of it throughout oeuvre.
Kazin’s comment on Naipaul’s view of history, though mainly based on India: A Wounded Civilization (1977) is very instructive: “history as irony without solution, history without obvious redemption, history as a mass ‘shattering’ of traditions all help to explain Naipaul’s powerful quietness as a writer”. (NYT 1977)

In 1967, two years before the publication of The Loss of El Dorado, reviewing Bjorn Landstroms Columbus, Naipaul without claiming the title of a new historicist or revisionist, without fanfare, wrote scathing revaluation of the legendary discoverer – “he was looking less for America or Asia than for gold.” In fact, “the Indies, the source of his gold, where he thought, he had discovered the terrestrial paradise, had become largely through his example, the annus mundi”. From Columbus’s own words, Naipaul deduces his egotism, his banality and always his greed. This brief commentary serves as an antidote to the ‘heroic loss’ of Columbus’s reputation and the ‘traditional gloss’ of Landstrom’s book. It can also be regarded as a prelude to the first story of The Loss of El Dorado. In this book, the portrait of Sir Walter Raleigh is remarkable. Sir Walter is better known as an adept courtier, soldier, adventurer and writer. Naipaul seeks what is unknown about the historical heroes. Naipaul’s portrait of Raleigh shows his contempt for his followers and his victims and his brutality with his tendency to escape from the consequences of his action in fantasies of his own glory. Naipaul emphasizes the vacillation of the courtier and the soldier, the timidity of the
adventurer, dreaming of liberating the Indians who never believed in the legendary gold he sought.

Such recreations of history are more evident and apprehensible in reference to India in his reputed trilogy. Forgetting the overall contributions of Vinoba Bhave and the other facets of his work, Naipaul portrays a new Vinoba Bhave far from the recognized saint among Indians for his great deeds. Naipaul takes down that Bhave started his career as a successor of Gandhi and all the Indians thought so, but Bhave’s life and deeds have created a “strenuous parody” of Gandhi’s life and achievements:

Bhave has swallowed his master. Gandhi took the vow of sexual abstinence when he was thirty-seven, Bhave took the same vow when he was a child... Gandhi was made by his thorough learning in home as well as abroad; Bhave was made only in Gandhi’s ashram by serving there... (IWC 148)

Bhave went to Banaras. There he spent one complete year for studying Sanskrit. One day at the Gangaghat, a literature student asked Bhave’s opinion on Shakuntalam, the late fourth century Sanskrit play by Kalidasa. It is a product of the golden age of Indian civilization and is a magnum opus in Indian literature. Naipaul quotes Bhave’s own words “I have never read Shakuntalam of Kalidasa and I never shall. I don’t learn the language of the Gods to amuse myself with love stories and trifles.” Naipaul criticizes this kind of spirituality which swallows up and annuls that very civilizations of which Indians boast. Bhave’s consciously ignoring Shakuntalam reduces him as a saint. It affects his greatness. At times Naipaul’s convictions are far from good logic and intelligibility. Not only this,
Naipaul concludes that the entire life of Bhave is a fiasco. The highly tempoed and much-hyped prank of his ‘land gift scheme’, for which he appeared on the cover of Time magazine, to Naipaul is a wild goose chase. Bhave’s almost inhuman walk throughout the country with innumerable followers is simply a crowd to Naipaul creating a circus like atmosphere, din, shouts, belching, hawking and farting. Naipaul concludes:

Magic had not worked; spirituality had not brought about land distribution or, more importantly the revolution in social attitudes that such redistribution required. The results had been the opposite. Bihar where Bhave did much of his walking remains in matters of land and untouchability — among the most backward and crushed of the Indian states. (IWC 152)

Elsewhere he has said that Bhave “is not a particularly intelligent man and as a perfect disciple of Mahatma, not original. His political views come close to nonsense.” (IWC)

Certainly this is not the Bhave, that Indians know and kowtow. Above all Bhave was not a political man. He was a saint of Indian heritage devoted to social reform. He was innovative, in the land gift scheme and such innovation can come only from a man of intelligence and will. Naipaul should have appreciated his genuine efforts rather than counting his success and failures. Land gift scheme was not a total failure. Numberless people were given land that brought the needed succour to their survival. Like happiness, goodness is also an occasional episode in the general drama of life; it can not persist for long but this doesn’t imply that human beings should desist efforts that may be beneficial the posterity.
Why only Bhave, if the aftermath is to be judged and taken into consideration almost all great visionaries are to be questioned – Plato, Socrates, Buddha, Mahavir, Nanak, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, Gandhiji and so many of them. Does Naipaul mean to say that they are all worthless because they have not left a lasting impact on the psyche of the common mob. This is undue intellectual tyranny. Naipaul, as far as such cultural, historical, and civilizational assaults are concerned, is a part of the occidental that has been described by Edward Said in ‘Orientalism’. Orientalism refers to the sum of the west’s representation of the orient as a “timeless place, changeless and static, irrational.” Said further states that the western traveler perpetuates commonly held assumptions about the orient as a “mythic place of exoticism, moral laxity, and sexual degeneracy”. Exactly in the same way Naipaul in the last few pages sums up:

It seems to be always there in India; magic, the past, the death of the intellect spirituality annulling the civilization out of which it issues. India swallowing its own tail. (IWC 153)

Had all this been true in its entirety, how can one assume, where India would have been? So one must be on his guard while going through such phases of recreation of history by Naipaul. It is in stark contrast to the common historical perspectives. In fact it is not a recreation of history, but a distortion of history. Since history cannot be recreated on the basis of sparse evidence that are cut off from its contexts but on the basis of evidence that is consolidated by other resources and is available in plenty.

Naipaul’s non-fiction gives a close view of his ideas on himself in relation to India; these books deserve an extended analysis, if only because Naipaul
himself once stated "...I consider my non-fiction an integral part of my work". These discursive books touch on his expatriate predicament, his separation from India, his links with it, the shape of contemporary India and the texture of his sensibility shaped by impressions of the civilization of India, Africa, and the societies of the West Indies.

Even on a first reading of these books, it is clear that Naipaul’s is a confident, hypersensitive personality endowed with a remarkable clarity and integrity of approach to the analysis of his own self and others. He cries out in dissent: “I do not want to be like them” (What’s Wrong with Being a Snob? 38). Such a viewpoint led him to initially separate himself from the "mediocrity" of West Indian society, and come to London, to become a writer, an ambition desired for and handed over to him by his father, Seepersad Naipaul. Naipaul says of his migration to London:

I could not have become a writer without London: the whole physical apparatus enables a man to make a living. London is my metropolitan center; it is my commercial center... (VSN 41)

Believing the writer to be "the last free man", Naipaul had tried to write and earn in London, initially making little money, but consoling himself with the wittily ironic and truthful remark that London was at least better than Trinidad, where writing was considered its own reward.

London brought the problem of audience and home:

...you write in London and you don’t have an audience-you are just hanging in the air and being an artist in a vacuum, which is nonsensical... (FC 34)
Naipaul in London had first tried to shed his nature as a colonial for, “to be a colonial was to know a kind of security; it was to inhabit a fixed world” (Conrad’s Truth 59). Naipaul had seen the tragedy of his father’s life and career as a journalist in colonial Trinidad caught between the confusion of two worlds, Indian and western, never deciding on any one. Naipaul established himself as an authentic commentator and critic on Third World Societies, as well as a writer concerned with the human predicament—of homelessness—in the contemporary world. Having proved himself against the standards of the best writers, Naipaul is unsparing in his attack on those colonials who remain “mimic men” through slackness, lack of intellectual rigor, and slavery to unexamined tenets given by family, community or race.

Having decided to make his life on his own terms, Naipaul is however deeply interested in the life of his grandfather’s generation, his father’s and of course his own. India is naturally the “starting point” of Naipaul’s inquiry. Since it is the homeland of his grandfather, and, the deepest layer of Naipaul’s own past, Naipaul’s truest and most living fictional heroes grapple with their Indianness. The first generation immigrants revered India, carried it within them, and kept it alive through an active, continuous nostalgia. The second generation practiced its forms, while having contempt for its poor status in comparison to European religion and culture. The third generation took the plunge and made the movement out, and with a true seriousness of purpose tried to recover India, but failed. India cannot be Naipaul’s roots or his home, but it is a recurrent interest. He writes in A Little More:
If I am compelled to state my interests, I suppose I can say I am interested in the past, in countries that are either strange or very large. (14)

India has also sparked off in Naipaul another interest – the problem of perception in relation to culture: “....Since I went to India I’ve become interested in the way different cultures have different ways of seeing.” The Indian community was Naipaul’s main focus even in his Trinidad novels, and he claims he has an affection for India, which he does not for the West Indies. He had been desperate to leave the West Indies, vowing to do so when he was in the fourth form, on the back of his Latin primer.

Eight years in London, and Naipaul found himself commenting on his withdrawal to a position of “non-attachment”:

...I find I have without effort, achieved the Buddhist ideal of non-attachment. I am never disturbed by national or international issues. I do not sign petitions. I do not vote. I do not march. And I never cease to feel that this lack of interest is all wrong. I want to be involved... (OB 16)

A passage of further eight years deepens Naipaul’s homelessness. White focuses on this in his Naipaul: A Critical Study:

He sees himself as a person utterly displaced, connected by birth and education with three different societies yet unable to establish living contact with any of them. (6)

He fails to find the perfect mould into which his sensibility can fit and there grows in him a longing for other places, other circumstances.
Naipaul first came to India in 1962. Touring India, living in Srinagar, writing and completing his first novel on English life, *Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion* there. Naipaul discovered affinities in patterns of response and behavior with Indians. He controlled his precipitate reaction to other aspects of India the dirt, the defecation, the blind adherence to two worlds, the failure to pay heed to history, and a neglect of their own past. Visiting his ancestral village in U.P. – the village of the Dubes – Naipaul recoiled from what must have appeared a hell – in terms of what he feels about dependence and “mini-men”. The stifling lack of opportunity seen in the cringing postures of his relatives was horrifying to a man who had distinct memories of the impoverishment of such a world. Naipaul angrily and contemptuously silences the pleas of this world, but not without fear. He exits on a plane to London, but arriving there, he finds the image of man, here too, equally distasteful, There is further withdrawal and isolation to a world smaller than he had ever known....his flat, his desk, his name.

Naipaul acknowledges that England gave him “a second childhood, a second becoming aware of the world” (OB 16), but this intellectual growth was only a layer rather than the foundation. He had found the Hindu world of Trinidad... “a peasant-minded, money-minded community, spiritually static because cut off from its roots, its religion reduced to rites without philosophy, set in a materialist colonial society...” (OB 16). London was lacking in “communal pleasures” and was barren Naipaul had his fears: “Unless I am able to refresh myself by travel – to Trinidad, to India – I fear that living here....will eventually lead to my own sterility...” (OB 17)
Naipaul today, has followed his own prescription adding Africa to his investigative journeys. He has become a traveller between continents, without a desire to return home. He belongs to the class of travelers whom Theroux describes in his *V. S. Naipaul: An Introduction to His Work* as:

...homeless; ... transplanted people who can claim no country as their own. They travel because they belong nowhere, they cannot settle, they are constantly moving – in a sense they never arrive – and much of their travel is flight. (77)

Past experience of stagnation and suppression – claustrophobia of the landscape in Trinidad, have left a germ of fear in Naipaul. This can be counted as the single greatest negative effect of his expatriation. Naipaul while entering new worlds to probe into them, carries his childhood fear that he just might not be able to escape. He longs to accept India even when his sensibility revolts from it. Suvir Kaul’s article “Burden of History” reads like this:

The India Naipaul recognizes is a Hindu India, and among the few occasions when he consciously identifies with Indianness, he does so with what he claims to be a long history of Hindu defeat.

(Gentleman 39)

Suvir Kaul here quotes Naipaul: “Hinduism has not been good enough for the millions. It has exposed us to a thousand years of defeat and stagnation...again and again Indian history has repeated itself: vulnerability, defeat, withdrawal.” (Gentleman 39)

Naipaul’s initial visit to India had made him, despite his empathy and attraction towards the Hindu philosophical world view, discover a strong
antipathy to other Indian attitudes. Making the journey by ship he had found
“another idea of man... a new type of authority and subservience”. Naipaul found
as he approached India not “whole men”, admirable in physique and bearing, but
a new category of men “diminished and deformed”, men who “begged and
whined”. The end is in the beginning: Naipaul resolves to preserve himself in
India:

Hysteria had been my reaction, and brutality dictated by a new
awareness of myself as a whole human being and a determination
touched with fear to remain what I was. (AAD 13)

Naipaul had grown up with India “in a special way” the background of his
childhood. Coming to India he was wonderstruck at “how complete transference
had been made from eastern Uttar Pradesh to Trinidad”, in his grandfather’s time.
India “artifacts” were well known to him. The attitudes were alien. The ways of
thinking and seeing in his grandfather, who “denied Trinidad”, were impossible to
Naipaul.

In Trinidad, Naipaul had been Indian in attitudes to food and pollution,
heeding the strictures of his Brahmin family with regard to strangers, especially
Muslims. But he is an outsider to his family being “born an unbeliever”. It is this
fact which cuts him off from the joys of the pilgrim to Amarnath, and also from a
huge segment of India. Naipaul concludes of the Hindu in him:

Perhaps I had received a certain supporting philosophy...... I found
only that sense of the difference of people... a vaguer sense of
caste, and a horror of the unclean... (AAD 32-33)
His reverence for old India expresses itself, as we find, in the desire, that his Indian friend Ramon killed in an accident in England should receive proper cremation. Ramon is without allegiance to home or country like Naipaul himself. One sees this reference in Naipaul's horror at electric lights being used instead of "the clay lamps of immemorial design" at Diwali in Bombay, Naipaul had built up a childhood fantasy about the beauty of India embodied in the Himalayas.

India could be what Trinidad was not. But coming to India he found "caste was unpleasant" unlike Trinidad where it did not count in "day-to-day life". Fantasy had kept the two worlds – Indian and the New World – "Juxtaposed and mutually exclusive" in Trinidad. But India showed them confused, violated and ridiculous, because London had penetrated deep, but not deep enough to create a new order. "The area of the imagination" which India was to Naipaul in childhood gave way before the India "smugness.... The imperviousness to criticism, the refusal to see, the double-talk and double-think...” These aspects of Indian life destroy, for Naipaul, his childhood myth of India.

Naipaul finds fault with Indians because they find poverty "an inexhaustible source of tears, an exercise of the poorest sensibility". This attitude maintains the status quo of the "degrees of degradation" he is confronted with. Indians, whether clerks or officials, or the swank new business class, like Bunty, cling to their origins. Naipaul concludes that "few Indians are outsiders". He finds the society static with only a change in its surface "mimicry". Yesterday Mughal and possibly tomorrow, Russian or American. He finds "The inner world" of Indians unchanged and this is where he is forced to part company with them. For Naipaul, the transformation of the colonial self, must be in terms of change in
values and attitudes. He cannot condone the “schizophrenia” of “the scientist who before taking up his appointment consults the astrologer for an auspicious day”. Naipaul does not mince words in condemning the Indian “withdrawal, denial, confusion of values”. Finding the same in Manohar Malgaonkar’s novel The Princes, where the public school product Abhayraj, son of a prince, finally reacts to his childhood friend, the untouchable Kanakchand, from a mere pique of caste.

For being an outsider advocating radical change, Naipaul praises Gandhi whose vision was direct and who did not ignore the obvious. But Gandhi was absorbed into “the formless spirituality of India”. The inner world of the Indians continued, indented, by the Mahatma’s action.

India as Naipaul finds it in the ‘60s is deplorable. Living amid ruins, Indians fantasize their spiritual and moral worth. They lack “a sense of history”, a feeling of loss for the past, and remain colonials in their preferences for dependence. Such attitudes, lead Naipaul to reject India, though he finds the Hindu concepts of dharma, life and death lofty. Naipaul finds with sadness what makes him truly an outsider in India “But I had learned to see; I could not deny what I saw. They remained in that other world.” (AAD 213)

Naipaul winds up his analysis of the failure of India’s creative spirit in An Area of Darkness, in the following words: “Shiva had ceased to dance”.

There are a few occasions however, when Naipaul feels himself to be an insider to India. The first of these few but powerful occasions occur when he boards a bus which contains a family party of Brahmin tourists. Observing the way in which their servant serves them food, time dissolves for Naipaul and he is linked with them through a forgotten Hindu self:
And now... in Kashmir, this encounter with the tourist family answered...the three generations which separated me from them shrank to one. The encounter had done more than dislodge a childhood memory; it awakened a superseded consciousness.

(AAD 144)

Another such occasion occurs when he visits his grandfather’s ancestral village and recognizes the shrines in the temple as similar to the ones in his parental home, back in Trinidad. Childhood connects India with Trinidad. Adulthood with its burden of reality ("seeing") and reason, severs him from India. Naipaul has "contracted out" of the medieval world-view through temperament and disposition. His year in India teaches him only his "separateness": "In a year I had not learned acceptance. I had learned my separateness from India and was content to be colonial without a past, without ancestors." (AAD 252)

Entering into the English world, gradually getting absorbed into its "alienness", experiencing "change, gain, loss", Naipaul gets satisfaction in keeping "whole", his "idea of India". The visit to the village of the Dubes fragments this vision. There, he finds a group of Brahmins, headed by Ram Chandra, the present head of the family, who is bent on using him. Naipaul is exasperated and angry—the demands on him for money and help are excessive. They are casually asked for and insensitively repeated. In the process, the past is ignored and demolished – Naipaul’s past of clarification, struggle and independence. Eager, even desperate to shrug off his relatives, Naipaul walks out in the middle of the conversation at Ram Chandra’s house, refusing to give a
village boy a lift into town, "So it ended, in futility and impatience a gratuitous act of cruelty, self-reproach and flight" (AAD 263).

Having extricated himself from the situation, Naipaul again grapples with his homelessness, on the flight back to London, tinged with a regret for the loss of India. His childhood awareness of "juxtaposed worlds" seems to function even now, as he places India besides Europe and sees India as real too. The defeat of India does not signal the victory of Europe:

How could I explain, how could I admit as reasonable, even to myself, my distaste, my sense, of the insubstantiality and wrongness of the new world to which I had been so swiftly transported. This life confirmed that other death; yet that death rendered this fraudulent. (AAD 265)

Facing "emptiness", "physically lost" in the home he has made and lived in London, Naipaul cannot "exorcise" India. He makes an attempt, in a dream, to unravel, "an oblong of stiff, new cloth," which was a present from an Indian friend before his departure. He knows the attempt will end in defeat. The dream projects Naipaul's despair at the riddle of his existence and being. Meanwhile, the journey to India has left Naipaul feeling that his life has been broken "in two". Of his sojourn in London, Naipaul had observed:

I came to London. It had become the centre of my world and I had worked hard to come to it. And I was lost... I had been misled: but there was nowhere else to go. (AAD 42)

Returning from India, all hopes exhausted he recognizes that they possess "....the Indian ability to retreat" – the very attitude which he condemns in Indians.
But the Hindu sense of the world as illusion which he had truly felt is already slipping away: “I felt it as something true which I could never adequately express and never seize again”. India cannot be home for though “Hindu speculation soared so high; its ritual remained so elemental”. Being either “English or Indian”, Naipaul is “denied the victories of both”. Painful is his awareness that for expatriates like him there is no retreat from the mist and rain of England “to a warm familiar land. For no such land existed”.

Naipaul’s sensibility which has sought home in India takes flight we see, when it scents “violence” in the land. His flight from India is provoked not only by the futility of contact with the Dubes, but by the racist attitudes and physical violence a Sikh acquaintance in India displays before his very eyes. Naipaul’s immediate instinct is to get out:

... until now I had never thought of India as a land of violence. Now violence was something I could smell in the air..... I wanted to get away at once ... (AAD 232)

Flight in Naipaul’s fictional protagonists too, is increasingly a reaction to racial and political violence – directly or indirectly experienced. India had lured Naipaul “as a definite point in...his journey homewards”. The promises have been deceptive “…but now I find it, and all such resting – places for the imagination, are like shadows, which a man, moving onwards cannot catch.” (AAD 27)

Attracted to India, linking up selectively with India, Naipaul has a longing to be able to accept India, to rid himself of anger and compassion and come to terms with the ‘total India negation’. It is such a bond which draws him back to study further, a changing India in India: A Wounded Civilization.
Naipaul's first trip to India in 1962 found him recoiling and escaping from its "endless repetition of exhaustion and decay...." He had experienced India "as an ache, for which one has great tenderness, but from which at length one always wished to separate oneself." (OB 51)

Yet in 1967, we find Naipaul returning to India for a second scrutiny, strengthening his ideas about the country, with less agitation and greater control. Naipaul sees now, a society in the process of breakdown, as a result of the "futility of the Indo-English encounter". India could not belong to the New World, as "the civilization was, and remains, opposed...." Naipaul had come as an "immigrant", a member of the New World. He had, he now realizes, done the wrong thing in taking India too "personally":

This is the hoax of India. We take the country too personally. We go with a sense of tragedy and urgency, with the habit of contemplating man, as man, with ideas of action: and we find ourselves unsupported. (OB 85)

The Indian lives in his "metaphysical timelessness" where Naipaul strives to pin him down to fact, history, individuality and "rebellion". Naipaul is not drawn to that India which is "simple". He cannot excuse the intellectual failure, or ignore it. He cannot avoid seeing that security, "the regularity of the rupees", is what counts for the Indian, leading to lethargy and stagnation:

Standards of wealth, nourishment, comfort, were low: and so, inevitable, were those of achievement. It took little to make a man happy and free him of endeavour. (OB 92)
Now comparing India with the west, Naipaul admires the west for its “complexity”, seeing India lagging far behind:

The gap between India and the west is not only the increasing gap in wealth, technology and knowledge. It is, more alarmingly, the increasing gap in sensibility and wisdom. The West is alert, many-featured and ever changing; its writers and philosophers respond to complexity by continually seeking to alter and extend sensibility... India possesses only its unexamined past and its pathetic spirituality. (OB 104-105)

The passage is important for the light it throws on the crystallization of Naipaul’s expatriate sensibility in the direction of the West. He points out with plain irony: “India is simple, the West grows wiser”.

Naipaul’s own verdict on his relationship with India, in India, is of certain bonds of experience evoked through sparks of memory, which however die out soon: “… for the colonial there can be no true return.” (OB 41)

Naipaul could have connected with India only if he saw in Indians “a renewal in the mind”. Finding them rooted in “magic and dependence” he pronounces his verdict on this “closed civilization”.

The crisis of India is not political ... Nor is the crisis only economic. These are only aspects of the larger crisis, which is that of a decaying civilization, where the only hope lies in further swift decay. (OB 105-106)

It is only a rare individual like Mr. Kudal, Election Agent for the Indira Congress whom Naipaul meets during the 1971 Election Campaign in Ajmer, that
he singles out for praise. He sees that Kudal has acted, transforming himself and
setting a Harijan village on the path of change, leading to Naipaul’s comment:
“without any Gandhian trappings, he was a dedicated man: and it was moving”.
(Ob 141)

Looking for improvement and change, Naipaul, yet again, placing his self
and sensibility alongside India, mixing more with workers and professionals
belonging to new and rapidly industrialized areas, attempts an evaluation of an
India in change in India: A Wounded Civilization. His third visit finds him brisk
and business like, less vulnerable, and rarely confessional. India is now less
mysterious.

India was “wounded” by Moslem and British rule. “Raped and
plundered”, it learned “little”. Carrying unexamined its burden of the past, it
obstructs creative growth – under the most modernized surfaces, old norms of
caste and religion can yet be sighted. But the signs of improvement breed a faint
hope in Naipaul this time. Expatriate, outsider-rebel as he is, he feels concern of a
special kind for India:

India is for me a difficult country. It isn’t my home and cannot be
my home; and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it, I cannot
travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far. (IWC 8-9)

Naipaul’s relationship with India, it is clear is unresolved except at the
level of paradox. “Close” to India by birth, he is “far” because he lacks those
“religious attitudes” which make India bearable. “To come to terms with the
strangeness of India”, Naipaul has unravelled every conscious and unconscious
layer of memory: "phantasmal memories of old India which for me outline a whole vanished world". (IWC 9) Here, for the first time Naipaul acknowledges that these memories "are like trapdoors into a bottomless past".

Moving through India, Naipaul now demolishes the Indian view that "India absorbs and outlasts its conquerors" feeling rather that India has steadily depleted intellectually over the last thousand years. He disagrees with R.K. Narayan's view expressed in 1961: "that India would go on". Narayan is an Indian in seeing order and continuity "where Naipaul with his sense of history and even the simplest ideas of human possibility", can see only "dereliction".

In Naipaul's response to India, we can see that he constantly moves between the two poles of criticism and defense of India – the criticism and rejection of modern India defends his painfully developed expatriate self; the defense of old India preserves the sanctity of his childhood self. Moving expertly between fact and intuitive grasp of Indian realities, Naipaul can comment from an outsider – insider position which combines empathy with irony "India taught the vanity of all action". The Hindu equilibrium or quietude "is only a means of securing an undisturbed clam: it is non-doing, non-interference, social indifference" – here is the expatriate outsider speaking. Then, setting Indian equilibrium besides that claimed to be attained by the Western hippies, Naipaul comments, in favour of Hindus speaking with an insider Hindu understanding:

Theirs [the hippies] is a shallow narcissism; they break just at that point where the Hindu begins; the knowledge of the abyss, the acceptance of distress as the condition of men. (IWC 27)
The awareness the third visit to India brings to him is of India’s “moral chaos” following independence: “not everyone now was content simply to have his being”. He sees the dawn of “new ways of seeing and feeling”, and a new “violence” as reflected in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar.

Naipaul is now in quest of a “dynamic” Indian identity. Poona in the process of industrialization, the Shiv Sena and the chawls in Bombay, make him alert to new beginnings, “Men handling new machines, exercising technical skills that to them are new, can also discover themselves as men, as individuals.” (IWC 74)

Naipaul’s values as expatriate constantly make him seek out those areas and people in India in revolt against their given “first principles” – of caste, family and religion. Here, re-examining his views on Gandhi, he concludes that with Gandhi too, as with other Indians, “there is no attempt at an objective view of the world”. It is this which holds back the revolution of the mind, and makes it “dependent in every practical way on other, imperfectly understood civilization”. Where there is “a defect of vision”, Naipaul cannot belong. This “defect of vision” coupled with the “under developed ego” of the Indian keeps Naipaul aloof from him. It leads him to dismiss, with withering scorn a modern institute like the National Institute of Design at Ahmedabad, which designs tools among other things for the poor peasant. Minutely examining the tools and their function, Naipaul demonstrates how “the whole project answered a fantasy of the peasant’s life....” (IWC 111)

For Naipaul, solutions to Indian problems lie not in spirituality or mimicry or a fake synthesis, but in “law consolidating administration, and years of patient
education”. Yet, the very same personality reverences “the beauty of sacrifice so important to the Aryans... a link with the earth and the antiquity of the earth, the beginning of things”. (IWC 9) Despairing of “magic, the past, the death of the intellect....” Which is always there in India, he acknowledges and pays tribute to the “elastic concept” of Hindu “dharma” which, combining “truth to the self with the ideas of action as duty... touches the high ideals of other civilizations.” (IWC 169)

Naipaul’s “many-sided background”, both the cause and the result of expatriation, is the subject of his writer’s autobiography, finding the Centre. Structuring as it does, his understanding of himself from boyhood until the present, the book is valuable material for a study of Naipaul’s sensibility. The book contains two narrative pieces, “Prologue to an Autobiography” and “The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro”, both dealing with “the process of writing”. Together, they bring together Naipaul’s “beginnings” as a writer, along with his stance as “a looker”, where he is seen constantly “exposing himself to new people and new relationships”. The narratives also confirm one’s reading the A House for Mr. Biswas is Naipaul’s most directly autobiographical novel, where childhood memory, carefully worked through, yields its core of being. The very events which are stressed to be important in the autobiography from the centre of the Biswas – Anand relationship through which a writing career is passed on from father to son. In order that Naipaul perfect this career, the expatriate choice is inevitable – Naipaul succeeds where his father, first sinking into anonymity on the pages of the changing Trinidad Guardian, ultimately faded out. Likewise, seeking
escape out of India in Trinidad, Biswas had been caught in confusion, and failed to make a decisive bid for independence.

Naipaul stresses in the autobiography, once again, now from the angle of the writer’s sensibility, his origins in India; “We were country people, Indians, culturally still Hindus. (FC 16) Born in such a cultural frame, Naipaul as a boy, experienced the shame and nervous tension of his father’s condition, who “dangled all his life in a half-dependence and half-esteem”. (FC 29) The struggles and demise of his father’s writing career leads Naipaul to experience “only anxiety” as far as his own writing is concerned. As a consequence, he also cherished. “Such ambition” that will not let him remain at ease, even after one, three and then six books are written. This unsettled childhood leaves Naipaul’s feeling that he has no place of his own, until adolescence Naipaul has traversed the following words:

....from my grandmother’s Hindu house in the country, still close to the rituals and social ways of India; to Port of Spain, the negro and G.I. life of its streets, the other, ordered life of my colonial English school....and then Oxford, London and the freelances’ room at the BBC. (FC 26)

Amid these layers of experience which have to be understood so that Naipaul does not write an “imperfect” man, India is important:

So there was a migration from India to be considered, a migration, within the British Empire. There was my Hindu family with its fading memories of Indian: there was India itself. (FC 27)
India must be re-entered into for Naipaul has realized the importance of his roots: “To become a writer, that noble thing, I had thought it necessary to leave. Actually to write, it was necessary to go back. (FC 40)

Naipaul’s sensibility in his own view has always leaned towards those individuals who had felt the need to move out of the West Indies. Bogart, a distant relative, was one such person, who occupied the ‘servant’ quarter in their Port of Spain house. Bogart’s absence have been rumoured about- he has gone to Venezuela – but it is only as an adult, in 1977, that Naipaul unravels his childhood fascination for the man who is to become the inspiration of the first story in his first book, *Miguel Street* Bogart’s “dreams” which are “partly” Naipaul’s own, are “of sensual fulfillment in another land and another language”, seeking escape from the clannish Hindu family life. Out of this family of “neutered men, oppressed and cantankerous women, uneducated children…” Naipaul feels he and others had wished to “break away”. But he is fair in admitting that it was this impoverished clan which had given “a high sense of the self”.

Growing up “with two ideas of history, almost two ideas of time” the fact filled and the fact free, as a colonial, Naipaul’s sensibility had attempted to unify, to order, and make whole his being through probing the “darkness” of his past. But in 1962, after a year in India coming to a head in the visit to his ancestral village, a “disturbance” is generated from the challenge the real India now makes to the mythical. Such a challenge engages Naipaul’s truest sensibility, permitting no stillness until resolved. It makes him a nomad traveling to “discover other states of mind”, to compare with his own.
Naipaul, exploring his father’s psyche and attitudes afresh shows how he “became a man on the other side”. But he could never completely maintain this position. His father existed on “three planes” — as the reporter, the reformer, and the sacred Hindu. “Each role made nonsense of the other”, in Naipaul’s eyes. What is worse is that “for thirteen years he (Naipaul’s father) had no house of his own” This generated an insecurity which is passed on to Naipaul as “hysteria”, negative as an emotion, but positive as a drive:

...his hysteria from the time when I didn’t know him: his fear of extinction.... That fear became mine as well. It was linked with the idea of the vocation: the fear could be combated only by the exercise of the vocation”. (FC 72)

Naipaul is fully conscious not only of the causes which motivated expatriation, but also the effects, some strongly negative, of such a position. Being expatriate writer, he is free to examine objectively the truth behind the crocodiles fed ritually at the Presidential palace in Yamoussoukro, the subject of his second narrative in the book. The inquiry enables him to speculate on subjects close to his sensibility — reason, magic, modernization, and the expatriate type. He sees the Ivory Coast through the black and white expatriates firstly, though he sees through them later. Searching for “an attitude, a thought — out position about Africa”, Naipaul ultimately concludes that it is still a world of the “night”; “at the bottom of it all was magic”. Both magic and poison continue to be part of a world that is still whole. The narrative does not end in futility or despair, because Africa — they comment cautiously, so far and no further. And a West — Indian — African expatriate from England, Busby shows no change in attitude from that of his
father who had served in Africa, maintaining that “old ideas might turn out to be best ideas”. (FC 109) Busby is a journalist, a publisher, yet unaltered by the mental attitudes of his profession: “he looked for a development which permitted Africans to keep their own soul”. The expatriate in Naipaul, rejecting magic and superstition, cannot condone such a position. His most inward comment on the expatriate predicament comes in relation to an Englishman, Philip, who had worked in Uganda during the troubled period of Idi Amin’s rule. Of Philip he notes:

He had become an expatriate, a man out of his country, a man moving between two continents: one place always made bearable by the prospect of departure for the other”. (FC 125)

Expatriates, the most genuine ones, in Naipaul’s reading, refrain from an enduring commitment to any particular place. As for the shallower expatriate types, what makes them so is their evasiveness.

Judging Africans, as he had earlier evaluated about Indians, Naipaul surmises: “The inner world, the other world continued whole,” despite the colonial wounding and the impact of the New World.

Naipaul’s frank, painstaking and rigorous examination of issues shaping and making his expatriate personality, reveals him to be a deep writer.
Works Cited


<http://www.hindu.com/mag/2005/03/06/stories/2005030600740500.htm>