Abstract

A Civilization Decoded: Naipaul’s Use of the Travelogue in the Indian Context

Historically, travel writing has been accommodated to diverse ends. From being an enabler of geographical knowledge about the Other to being instrumental in asserting epistemological dominion over it, travel writing—as our contemporary engagement with the genre evinces—continues to generate what can be classified as new “ways of seeing.” This thesis examines the polymorphic possibilities of travel writing as a literary form as evident in the India trilogy of Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul or V. S. Naipaul (b. 17 August 1932). Focusing on the chosen texts (An Area of Darkness [1964] India: A Wounded Civilization [1977] and India: A Million Mutinies Now [1990]), it explores how Naipaul utilises the travelogue to “decode” the civilization of India—primarily from a postcolonial perspective. While Chapters 1 through 3 help situate Naipaul’s travel writing within the wider context of postcolonial discourse, Chapters 4 through 6 analyse the cultural, political and social entailments implicit in Naipaul’s narrative representation of India. Lastly, Chapter 7 sums up the study, providing an overview of the major findings. This thesis demonstrates how Naipaul’s use of the travelogue in the Indian context leads to the creation of complex textual environments: urban, (post-)pastoral, heterotopian and the abject. The formulation and emergence of postcolonial subjectivity constitute one of the major preoccupations of the Naipaulian discourse and this thesis—by drawing upon the theories
and works of Michel Foucault, Homi K. Bhabha, Benedict Anderson, Walter Benjamin, Raymond Williams, James Clifford and Johannes Fabian among others—attempts to trace the reformulation of the notions of the Self, Space/Place and Nationhood in the context of postcolonial/post-Independence India.