CHAPTER – 5

COMPARATIVE APPRAISAL OF BOTH THE AUTHORS

“Writing was never my career. It was a passion… I write to enjoy my life. Without writing, I would have been a dead person”\(^1\)

says Indira Goswami.

“I began to write, I am afraid, for no other reason than because I thought it would be nice to be writer”\(^2\)

says V.S. Naipaul

(A thin line of difference in approach to literary pursuits of both these famous writers has been discernible here.)

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 2001 and well known ‘Indian’ writer on India, was born of Hindu ancestors in Trinidad at Chaguanas on 17 August 1932. Chaguanas is often referred to as the peasant’s paradise which then consisted of 1452 inhabitants and only 43 ratable buildings. He was born in Lion House, home of Capildeo family whose seventh daughter Broptie was married to his father in 1929. His grandfather had migrated from India to teach the Indian cane workers of Trinidad. The house of Capildeo has been described by Naipaul as:

My mother’s family house in Chaguanas was a well known big house. It was built in the North Indian style. It had ballustrated roof services and the main terrace was decorated at either end with a statue of a rampant lion.\(^3\)

His father Seepersad was a journalist and a literary writer. He was a reporter in the Trinidad Guardian and also published a collection of short stories under the title Gurudeva and Other Indian Tales in 1943. His brother Shiva Naipaul was also highly talented and was on his way to acquiring great popularity when he passed away in his early thirties in an accident. He left Trinidad and went as an adult to Britain in 1950, to study at Oxford, where he established a career as a broadcaster and prolific writer. He married Patricia Ann Hale in 1955. He continues to live in Britain, and has over
the past forty years written several travelogues and many novels. It is basically his non fiction novels, particularly on India in which Naipaul appears very critical, controversial, as well as thought provoking. V.S. Naipaul considers himself nearer to Joseph Conrad as he writes in one of his essays ‘Conrad’s Darkness’, and I quote from in An Illustrated History of English Literature by A.K. Mehrotra:

And I found that Conrad – sixty years before, in a time of great peace – had been everywhere before me.  

There is a combination of several strands of different cultures in Naipaul’s personality. He is a Trinidadian by birth, Indian Brahmin by descent and Western by education and attitudes. But as Mr. M.K. Naik in his book History of Indian English Literature published by Sahitya Akademi, says:

V.S. Naipaul’s Indian ancestry is indisputable, but he is so much of an outsider when he writes about India and the Indians and so much of an insider while dealing with Caribbean life and character, that there can be no two opinions on his rightful inclusion in the history of West Indian writing.

He is rightfully included in the history of the West Indian literature. He also occupies a unique place in English literature with ten works of nonfiction including seven travelogues, a history book and two collection of essays. His travelogues encompass India; South Asian, Latin American and Mid East Islamic nations and the Caribbean countries. This in fact lends to his writing with an immense range of observations. William Welsh writes:

Coleridge’s words about Wordsworth are peculiarly appropriate to the nature of Naipaul’s sensibility, He has the telescopic sight of the unattached observer who is not only a creative observer, even an observer of genius, but one in whom the observation of others leads to analyses of self.

Naipaul has carved a unique niche for himself in the World of Literature like several of his contemporaries. He has been writing over five decades and has written novels, short stories, non-fictional novels, travelogues, fictional autobiographies and biographies, journalistic writings and history among other things. Naipaul’s fictional creation includes The Mystic Masseur (1957), The Suffrage of Elvira (1958), Miguel Street (1959), A House for Mr. Biswas (1961), Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion (1963), The Mimisc Men (1967), A Flag on the Island (1967), In a Free State (1971),


Naipaul’s entire contribution to literature is spiralling round and round expatriate themes which are central to his creative effusion. He is a truthful storyteller. His concern with quality of work comes out in a recent interview – based on features published in India Today Plus. To quote: Naipaul’s own words:

I spend a lot of time writing in my head when I am working on a book……..

I never have written an unconsidered sentence. I have never even put an unconsidered punctuation mark.⁷

For him writing is a liberating experience as one of his letters, written in 1987, suggests.

I wanted to be a writer because I wanted to be famous; because I wanted to be free…..

The contemplation that goes with writing, and the clarity it requires, make for calm.

It is for me the equivalent of religion.⁸

V.S.Naipaul’s short stories have appeared in two collections: Miguel Street (1959) and A Flag on the Island (1967). These two collections are different from each other. Miguel Street contains simple and homogeneous stories about the people in the West Indies, while the other. A flag on the Irland has shown picaroon society and Naipaul’s deep understanding.

Naipaul’s non-fictional works form half of his writing which includes his journalistic articles, travelogues, non-fiction novels and history proper. In the Middle Passage (1962), he explores the Caribbean islands, which he visited after spending several
years in Britian. In Among the Believers (1981) and Beyond Belief (1998) Naipaul writes about his five months of travel in four non-Arab Muslim countries – Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan, and Malaysia in which he shows a similar ambivalence and fragmented perception of Islam. The basic idea is that all non-Arab Muslims have to reject their own history and adopt the Arab heritage. In A Turn in the South (1989), he presents his journeys to the Latin American nations and depicts his journeys through the deep South of the U.S.A. Naipaul has also written many essays over the period of a decade and half and collected them in The Overcrowded Barracocon (1972). Reflective in nature these essay deal with his youthful impatience regarding fraudulent living. Along with his fictional and non-fictional works Naipaul wrote The Loss of El Dorado (1969), which defies being categorized either as a novel or history and deals with the history of colonization of Trinidad in particular and the Third World countries in general. Naipaul’s Guerrillas (1975) is a fictional history of crisis – ridden Trinidad through fictional characters. In A Free State (1971) Naipaul depicts the rootlessness and the people’s quest for identity as a world phenomenon. Naipaul portrays the political scenario, particularly of the Caribbean islands, through a fictional island of Elvira, in The Suffrage of Elvira (1958). Finding the Centre and The Enigma of Arrival are possibly the most autobiographical of Naipaul’s writings. The former has been used to substantiate facts from Naipaul’s life and his development as a writer. The latter, an autobiographical work, is based on rural England, in Wiltshire where Naipaul has a cottage to which he often retreats.

Naipaul’s A Way in the World starts by reiterating what he had taken up in The Enigma of Arrival, namely, his own experience of racial politics in Trinidad in the late 50’s. Naipaul illuminates in A Bend in the River (1979) the vulnerability of the world, which wastes its potentialities. It consists of the people who are nostalgic for their past which leads them to a state of despair. Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion (1963) was written in Kashmir, a place that calmed his hysterical response to the overpowering impressions of India. Naipaul in The Mystic Masseur portrays the character of Ganesh and reveals the society, which he comes from.

Naipaul presents a picture of three generations of immigrant Indian community in Trinidad in A House for Mr. Biswas (1961). He presents an account of Mr. Biswas’s journey from birth to death in a biographical manner. The Mimic Men
(1967) is an autobiography of a third World fallen politician, who writes this account from London where he has come to spend his life in self exile. Naipaul’s _Half A Life_ (2001) is considered to be a potent distillation of his works to date. It is a fine novel revealing the spiritual legacy of the placeless and homeless.

Since the present thesis is a discussion on his travelogue _India: A Million Mutinies Now_, in comparison to Indira Goswami’s _Pages Stained With Blood_, these three travelogues namely, _An Area of Darkness, India: A Wounded Civilization, India: A Million Mutinies Now_ bear significance in relation to the present study as all of them depict his experiences of India. India has attracted Naipaul more than any other country of the world. He visited India thrice, in 1962-63, 1975-76 and 1988-89, and wrote his accounts in three travelogues where he depicts his experiences and his negotiations with its people. These three books on India trace the growth of Naipaul’s attitude towards India and Indians from sharp impressions and disappointments of the first visit as expressed in _An Area of Darkness_ to a perception of India, in _India: A Wounded Civilization_, as a decadent civilization which needs to make a clean break with the past in order to pave the way for a better future. There is a gradual resignation to all that he sees in India and he attempts to interpret current situations and issues to his largely western readership in _India: A Million Mutinies Now_. Naipaul comments in _India: A Wounded Civilization_

> I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far.\(^9\)

Naipaul firstly presents facts and evidences to the readers followed by his individual judgment imbued with impeccable dramaturgy. Naipaul as an artist has a noble purpose that is his “commitment to deliver the truth”. Naipaul uses flashback technique in his writing. Naipaul in this book _India A Million Mutinies Now_ explores history for tracing the root of a particular phenomenon i.e. million mutinies.

Naipaul’s third book on _India: A Million Mutinies Now_, his most ambitious book on the country till date is a perspectival account of history as viewed by a constantly travelling fictionalist and an observer:

That book on India (_India A Million Mutinies Now_) is not oral history; it’s an account of a civilization at a hinge moment. It’s done through human experience; there is a special shape to the book, its held together by a thread of inquiry, it’s very careful
composed. The idea came to me that the truth about India wasn’t what I thought about India, it’s what they are living through. That is the great discovery; I moved to it slowly through earlier books, the books about the Islamic countries and the Deep South ......The travel book for me has also been a process of learning. It’s much more than oral history. A lot of the work lay in the actual travel, and the day –to-day thinking.10

It can be said that V.S.Naipaul is best known in the literary world as a writer of diaspora and the one who gives expression to the theme of rootlessness and the crisis of identity. All his writings have a close relationship with his personal life. This can also be said of Indira Goswami. She herself states that her “novels have autobiographical elements”.

I saw the scene of that horrible riot of Delhi with my naked eyes. Standing at the balcony, I saw the fire of the shops of the Sikhs which were set ablaze. The sky of Delhi took the colour of copper. The black ashes of various burnt up things floated above the sky like the feathers of sacrificed pigeon .............. In this riot, the hospital of our Sikh doctor Jagga and the residence of lawyer Randheer Chawla was burnt to ashes.11

Indira Goswami is a distinguished name in the world of literature. In the year 2000, she was honoured with ‘Jnanpith’, the highest literary award in India, for her contribution to Indian literature. She was a prolific author, a Ramayani scholar, an editor and former Professor of Delhi University. She was one of those few regional-language writers in the country who transcended all regional barriers. She has peopled her novels with characters drawn from different linguistic groups with diverse social backgrounds across different regions of India.

Born to Umakanta Goswami and Ambika Devi on 14 November 1942 in Guwahati, she was named Indira by her father in memory of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. She was lovingly called Mamoni by her mother. Mamoni Raisom Goswami is her pen name by which she preferred to write. Indira Goswami studied in Pine Mount School, Shillong in the early years and matriculated from Tarini Charan Girls’ High School, Guwahati. Her maiden collection of short stories *Chinaki Morom (1962)* was published when she was thirteen years of age. She graduated from Cotton College, Guwahati and obtained her postgraduate degree in Assamese Literature from Gauhati University.
She met Madhaven Raisom Iyengar, an engineer from Karnataka, who was then working on the construction of Saraighat Bridge over the River Brahmaputra in Guwahati. After getting married, they moved to Gujarat and later to Jammu and Kashmir where Iyengar was posted. But unfortunately, just after eighteen months of marriage, Madhaven Raisom Iyengar lost his life in a car accident in Kashmir. After the premature death of her husband, Indira Goswami suffered from acute depression, got addicted to heavy doses of sleeping pills and even made attempts to end up her life.

After her husband’s death, she devoted her time to writing and wrote only to live. Her sufferings and struggles in life are conveyed in her book *An Unfinished Autobiography* (A Half-Written Autobiography, 1988), written in the style of a novel. She taught at the Goalpara Sainik School for a while and then joined her research supervisor at Vrindavan to immerse herself in the study of the *Ramayana*. She obtained her PhD for a comparative study of Tulsi Das’s *Ramcharit Manas* and Madhav Kandali’s Assamese *Ramayana*, but her experience of staying alone in a temple in Vrindavan gave her deep insight into the lives of the widows there. Her *Nilakanthi Braja* (1976) is one of the earliest and most perceptive studies on the lives of the widows of Vrindavan. Indira Goswami joined the Department of Modern Indian Languages of Delhi University in 1971 as a Lecturer and retired as a Professor from the same department. The first novel penned by Indira Goswami was *The Chenab’s Current*, *(Chenabar Sot)* which she started writing in 1964 and was published as a book in 1972. The story of the novel was based on her experience while she was in Kashmir with her husband. Her novel *The Rusted Sword* *(Mamore Dhora Tarowal)* (1980) has an obvious protest against the force that tends to obstruct man in his wish to fulfill his human desires. In this novel, however, the force is depicted in its socio-political aspect. Her experiences in life are also reflected in her novels *The Blue Necked Braja* *(Neelkanthi Braja)* (1986) and *Ahiron*. In *The Blue Necked Braja*, she examined the social and psychological deprivations of widowhood.

….I have tried to show how the mental and physical state of a young widow takes a different shape and how this change affects her life after her widowhood….  

she stated in its introduction.
In Ahiran she also depicts exploitation of women. In the Dontal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah (The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker, 2004), she portrayed the lives of widows in a *sattrā* (Vaishnavite monastery). Her imagination was captured by the raw reality of the streets, the slang of the lower classes, and the incongruous intersections of urban life. Her novel *The Moth Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* was later made into a film named *Adajya* which received much acclaim and awards. In Tej Aru Dhuilire Dhushorito Prishtha (Pages Stained With Blood, 2001), a young female teacher visits the neighbourhoods of Delhi deeply affected by anti-Sikh riots in the wake of the assassination of Indira Gandhi by two of her Sikh bodyguards. Even as the story bears witness to the bloodshed in Delhi, it also personalizes the political impasse with a humane narrative. Through it – the teacher is falling in love with the Sikh rickshaw puller who is taking her through the divided city.

In the more recent Chinnamastar Manuhto (The Man from Chinnamasta, 2005), Goswami wrote about animal sacrifice at the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati. The novel condemns the practice of violence and slaughter in the name of religious rituals and questions the role of religion provoked controversy.

Several short stories were written by the acclaimed author and some of them were *The Journey, The Offspring, To Break a Begging Bowl, Beasts, Parasu’s Well, Dwarka and His Gun, Sanskar, etc.* *Pain and Flesh* is her only poetry collection which includes her well-known poem *Pakistan* and more importantly she has written a poem on V.S. Naipaul and dedicated the poem to him. *Mahiyashi Kamala* is her biography on Kamala Ratnam.

She translated many books such as Premchandor Chuti Galpa, Jatak Katha Aru Kalam and Adhaghanta Samay. Her recent works include *The Bronze Sword of Thengphakhri Tehsildar* (a novel based on the battle against the Britishers for Indian independence by a section of Bodo people under the leadership of Thengphakri) which is a novel again, with a historical perspective drawn through extensive field study and research and published after her return to Assam from Delhi, in the year 2007. This is her novel fictionalizing history imbued with her thoughts and experience.
Indira Goswami has similarities with Naipaul on a number of counts. Both of them write from their felt experiences drawing personal life into them. The novels that are studied here *India: A Million Mutinies Now* and *Pages Stained with Blood* are the first hand experiences where fictionalized characters are living ones who happen to be their primary sources personally encountered by both of them while Naipaul portrays his characters objectively, many a time in a matter of fact style, in Indira Goswami’s writings are marked by more humanist appeal. Indira Goswami has consciously explored and illustrated how man’s base desire gives birth to barbarity and even amidst it there is a glitter of humanity stored up in the various layers of the human heart even among those who take resort to violence and barbarity.

I saw the lustre of divine love for humanity at a few places even amidst this cruelty.
At a few places I saw with these naked eyes of mine the bond of love between the Hindus and Sikhs glittering with divine lustre even though drenched with blood.\(^{13}\)

Goswami has also delineated this rekindling spirit of humanity through one God fearing Sikh, Majnu in *Pages Stained With Blood*. The writer has said about him:

He used to sit in a garden near Chandrawal and speak to people about humanity –
The same omkar has given birth to both Hindus and Muslims – Call him Rama or Rahim, Krishna or Karim. There is no welfare in meditation or praying to idols, there is welfare in accomplishing, ones duties.\(^{14}\)

The writer gets busy nursing the injured Sikhs in the massacre. She even searches for Santokh Singh among those injured, but could not find him. At that time her heart was full of deep sympathy. The writer has illustrated this:

In this way I attained a kind of courage in my heart while cleaning the blood. It is only at such times that the courage concealed within the heart of man reveals itself.\(^{15}\)

Referring to *Pages Stained With Blood* Hiren Gohain observes that the novel has opened up and lighted more than one aspects of hidden mind of Indian society. From sociological points of view there are diverse layers of human heart and mind imprinted in the novel. These are the impressions of history.\(^{16}\)
Both the writers Naipaul and Goswami narrate accounts of a very disturbed period of India’s history. Experts from Swedish Academy awarding the 2001 Nobel Prize for literature to V.S. Naipaul commented:

For having united perspective narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories.\(^{17}\)

Naipaul’s *India : A Million Mutinies Now* creates a sense of wonder in reader’s mind with the bright as well as deep and a lucid picture of India where, however the dark background is not wholly lost. But these dark clouds are not without the silver lining unlike Naipaul’s preceding books on India like *An Area of Darkness* and *India: A Wounded Civilization* where he saw India as:

…the featureless area of darkness\(^{18}\)

……a wounded old civilization that has at last become aware of its inadequacies and is without the intellectual means to move ahead\(^ {19}\)

……India has changed; it was not the good and stable country it had once been. \(^{20}\)

Naipaul’s vision of India seems to have changed substantially. Along with decay, frustration, rebellion and mutinies, Naipaul notices in the intellectual life of India a deep consciousness of wholeness and humanism, growth and restoration and his vision is based on this awareness of wholeness and humanism which make it altogether a book with a difference.

Excess was now felt to be excess in India. What the mutinies were also helping to define was the strength of the general intellectual life, and the wholeness and humanism of the values to which all Indians now felt they could appeal. And strange – irony – the mutinies were not to be wished away. They were part of the beginning of a new way for many millions, part of India’s growth, part of its restoration. \(^ {21}\)

Compared to this gradual shift Indira Goswami’s work is a revalidation of an enduring sense of optimism that her previous works often demonstrate. Her book *Pages Stained with blood* provides an illuminating account of Sikh carnage of 1984. Infact Naipaul presents a picture of the entire country but Goswami depicts only a part of the country i.e. disturbed Punjab. Naipaul as a writer generally presents firstly facts
and evidences and then followed by his individual judgement. Naipaul uses specific details while portraying things.

What makes a story colourful and new is the details. 22

Naipaul in this book mainly explores history for tracing the root of a particular phenomenon and he substantiates it by his judgment.

In India with its layer below layer of distress and cruelty, it had to come as disturbance. It had to come as rage and revolt. India was now a country of a million little mutinies. 23

The most remarkable feature of this book lies in the fact that Naipaul expresses his views on sensitive subjects indirectly through his various characters rather than himself. Thus Naipaul recedes into the background and makes his characters express their views which clearly stand to support and reiterate the author’s views.

..... India: A Million Mutinies Now is a fascinating record of his impressions of modern India, recounted through interviews with wide variety of its variety of its people..... 24

So, the prose style of Naipaul is more unique in the sense that the

.....characters involvement with the narrator is, however, so skillfully intertwined with more obviously autobiographical detail that there is no clue given in the text as to where facts ends and fiction begins. This may prove exasperating to those readers who prefer to know whether they are reading history, autobiography or fiction. 25

It is seen that in this work the common tunes that permeate all the stories is that of success, achievement and development. Naipaul in this work expresses through anecdotal narration and conversations with people that illuminate his characters to be seen from different angles. He employs a variety of fictional techniques to give objectivity, profundity, roundness and universality to his persons and their situations. He combines first and third person narratives. Naipaul focuses on the things that are universally relevant and he makes his characters represent their types. Naipaul mainly finds in this book small events and activities pregnant with significance.

This is almost a new technique that Naipaul appears to justify his views which have not been accepted by many of his critics. Naipaul uses first person in here and
this technique that he used is close to the art of a journalist. Though in many respects
the writer appears to function as a journalist, he is neither given the position of a
journalist nor does he wish to function as a journalist, in a sense he may be called the
unacknowledged journalist who expresses his ideas and thoughts on a given situation
in the society, country or even in his own proprietorial position. This technique that
Nailpaul uses in this novel may be called as the expression of the filtered truth, i.e. the
writer usually described things in a seemingly journalistic manner but at the most
important realization it takes the form of universal truth This universal truth gives a
deep philosophical touch to this work.

Indira Goswami like Naipaul also from time to time uses first person technique. Her
writing is in the form of diary of the woman protagonist living all alone in Delhi and
recording first hand experiences during the riot in 1984

…..I leave for Gauhati on 20th November 1984, my desire to write the book on Delhi
pointing in broad swaths of colour the days and lives of the Mughals and the British
Raj, remaining unfulfilled and two wooden boxes of Balbir still with me, a small
steady hope in a corner of my heart may be he still will come one day… 26

Indira Goswami’s prose style is unique. In order to explain the subject matter more
sensitively or intensely, or sometimes, in order to make it more poignant Indira
Goswami uses realistic similes and symbols. In this diary- like novel she uses similies
and symbols to give a feeling of pure literature:

In the same way as adjusting rings one after the other in a newly dug well, I am
adjusting rings in the vault of my heart. Santokh Singh, how can you understand that
sometimes a few of these rings collide against pieces of rocks and get smashed into
bits in that grim dark vault ? 27

Naipaul mainly in his work has treated history.

….. My first instinct was towards the writing of history….It was an urge that
surprised me in the midst of activity … when with compassion for others there came
also an awareness of myself not as an individual but as a performer, in that child’s
game where every action of the victim is deemed to have been done at the command
of his tormentor ….. It was the shock of the first historian’s vision, a religious
moment if you will, humbling, a vision of disorder that was beyond any one man to
control yet which, I felt, if I could pin down, might bring me calm. It is the vision
that is with me now. This man, this room, this city; this story, this language, this form. It is a moment that dies, but a moment my ideal narrative would extend.28

Sense of history and the historical perspective in both the novels have been prominent essentials of this study. It is seen that Naipaul in this book has been very successful in bringing the past close to the present by connecting different events of history occurred at different points of time chiefly on the basis of identical impact and effect. Thus narrating the history of the Sikh, Naipaul connects the following events revealing his novel treatment of history:

…Events which can be dated and analysed, and placed at a proper distance from the present, can also at some stage begin to appear far away; can fade. Myths are fresh; they never lose their force. Though at Malerkotla in 1762 the Sikhs were massacred by an invading Afghan army, in Malerkotla in 1947, at the time of the partition of India and the population exchange between India and Pakistan – the flight of Muslims to Pakistan, and Sikhs and Hindus from Pakistan in Malerkotla in 1947, because of that Afgan nobleman who laid down gold sovereigns over the cremation site of the two sons of the 10th Guru, no Muslim was harmed. In the 1960’s the Sikh political party, the Akali Dal, nominated the Nawab of Malerkotla as their candidate, and he got the Sikh vote in three elections.29

In this connection it can be stated that Naipaul tries to make a resurrection of history when he connects two different events in different parts of the world to focus a similar situation as a result of which he appears to add some veracity to what may be called myth and legend in history:

In the Sikh catalogue of the torments and martyrdoms of its founding Gurus, the bricking up alive of the two sons of the 10th Guru has a special place. The story – with its echoes of King John and Richard III has some of the quality of myth.30

Indira Goswami also treated history in Pages Stained With Blood. She has infact touched the fresh clots of blood with her own hands in the pages of her novel. She described the terrible incident of Delhi. There is almost no difference between fact and fiction:

The situation of the country isn’t favourable. Yesterday the D.I.G. of Punjab, Mr. Autowal was shot to death by insurgents at the steps of the Golden Temple. The bullet – ridden body of Autowal was lying on the ground, the Prasad of suji in his
hand spread all around. Blood oozing out from his head and heart flowed down the steps like a fountain.

The body guards accompanying this Deputy Inspector General ran away. For a longtime, argument continued between the Granthi and the Commissioner concerning handing over the dead body.

Flies fell on the blood of Autowal and started buzzing.31

And again just like Indira Goswami, Naipaul’s travelogue are not only accounts of his experience of the outer world, they are equally of his own self. The narrator here is none other than the writer himself. The narrator’s account of himself corresponds exactly with that of the writer. He states,

I was born in 1932 ……I grew up with two ideas of India ……the first idea …. was about the country from which my ancestors had come.32

Naipaul himself states that I am the sum of my books,33

Said Vidiadhar Surajpersad Naipaul in his Nobel Lecture on December 7, 2001 and went on to add,

Each book intuitively sensed and, in the case of fiction, intuitively worked out, stands on what has gone before, and grows out of it. I feel that at any stage of my literary career it could have been said that the last contained all the others.34

S. Prassanarjan in his article in India Today has commented on Naipaul as a writer:

A master of details Naipaul places his novels in the real world and they reduce the distance between imagination and superb reportage.35

Anthony Powell commented

…this country’s most talented and promising writer….36

Indira Goswami just like Naipaul has revealed herself in the novel. She has disclosed herself with humane attitude:

All of a sudden I heard someone pounding at the door. At first sound the sound was light but soon it seemed as if someone was pounding with all his might ….It’s Santokh Singh! He is totally drenched in the rain.
I screamed, Why have you come in this condition at this hour of the night?
…………………………..I lost my self composure and shouted in anger, 'Santokh Singh! I
never thought that you could be such a drunkard.
……………………………..

If my very own brother would have come drunk at midnight and asked me for
money, I would not have given him money.”………………………….

I am restless for quite sometime. I go over to the edge of the balcony and look down
…. Remorse eats me. 37

Indira Goswami’s literary vision is all about humanity and she is a humanist writer. It
is her imprint as an exponent of humanity which is shining with golden lustre. She is
a sensitive writer who expresses attitude of equal estimation and compassionate
towards the suppressed, oppressed, the exploited, the poor, the marginalized etc.
While expressing the harshness of time realistically, she hasn’t stopped her search for
human. It is in this aspect that she deviates from V.S.Naipaul where Naipaul is a
socialist who analyzes the manners and morals of people in decaying as well as
developed societies. His views are that there is disturbance, instability and anxiety
prevailing in these societies. Compared to Indira Goswami his narration is more
objective and factual devoid of colour.

Naipaul’s philosophy can be best summed through the following quote:

This gives prominence once again to Naipaul’s sense of the vanity of human
ambitions – ‘life and man as the mystery, the true religion of men, the grief and the
glory…..38

In Indira Goswami’s works she talks about history, politics, sociology, folk–tradition
in the society. But the most distinguishing feature that comes out from her agitation
and deep melancholy on the annihilation of humanity and loss on human values
in society, the torture and depravity, cruelty to the low–living class of people
irrespective of caste, creed or religion as referred earlier. Her concern has been
always for reform and redressal and for hope and aspiration. In this context her three
novels – The Moth Eaten Howdah of Tusker, The Rusted Sword and Pages Stained
with Blood will always remain the best of her creations.
Hiren Gohain, a very distinguished and reflexive Assamese critic and litterateur, calls these three novels together— the Narration of a visit to a to Hell, likening it to a prevalent legend in Christian World—‘the Harrowing of Hell’ about the pangs and sufferings of the distressed and tortured souls in the Hell and Lord Christ’s desire to liberate and redeem them from enchainment.39

So, although the background and time frame of both the authors are poles apart, yet there are striking similarities between the two creative artists. Infact Indira Goswami herself had written a Tribute to V.S.Naipaul in her only work of poetry collection “Pain and Flesh“ and that shows similarity with diversity.

In the first page of the collection of poems Pain and Flesh the author dedicates the book to V.S.Naipaul in her note she writes:

Dedication to V.S.Naipaul Whom I had met at Fort of Neemrana. The title of the poem is ‘A Poem for Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul. The poem goes thus:

I saw a majestic elephant
Steeped in dust,
Rolling down a hill
At Chaguanas, Port of Spain!
Suddenly he stood still to become
A monument –
And Vidiadhar Surajprasad
Was born there!

………………………………………….
…………………………………………

***

Of a hundred bayonets in your tongue!

****

……Oh Vidiadhar! Your silence
Speaks with
A thousand voices

****

..............................
..............................

..............................

***

......I stopped near the window

And suddenly, I felt you passing by

And dissolving in the air!

Oh! Who lit the thousand

Candles in that abandoned house

at Chaguanas, Port of Spain ....!

Crossing the Atlantic ..... 

Oh Vidiadhar!

***

Is it a miracle?

Yes, it is a miracle!

I saw your hands in that

Abandoned house at

Chaguanas in Port of Spain!

When you were a thousand

Miles away on the

British Islands!

There you stood before me!

On 26th February 2001!

***

When you presented me the award of

The dazzling Devi –

The Devi, the goddess of Learning.....
That day the sky wore the garment

Of Rhodondedrons of the

Satoi Ranges of the Naga Hills.

Crossing the Seven Oceans,

Fragrance of Jasmin, Kapau and Karabi

came from the banks of

the Red River !!

You stood before me with that

Golden Goddess !

I saw you in the dazzling

light!

Oh! Vidiadhar Surajprasad

You have really come!

Is it true!.......that you are

standing before me!

In flesh and blood?

Is it the same Vidiadhar

Whom I met at Chaguanas?

……………………………………

in Chaguanas in

Port of Spain on 5th October 1999. 40

The above poem reflects the deep sense of reverence of Indira Goswami
towards V. S. Naipaul. She is impressed by the ideology of V.S. Naipaul and is
influenced by him.

129
References

1. Indira Goswami- Speech delivered in a conference held by Sahitya Akademi in Delhi where I was present.


7. Panwar, Purabi, New Literature in English: IGNOU: 2001 (Quoted in India Today Plus)


11. Indira Goswami’s own speech delivered in a conference held by Sahitya Akademi in New Delhi and also when interview given to News Live in the year 2008 at her residence in Gandhibasti, Uma enclave.


15. ibid p.24


27. Ibid, p.128


30. Ibid p.461


34. Ibid.


