Chapter-5

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V.S. Naipaul puts his view in *A Bend in the River*: “But all men live in constructs.
Civilization is a construct. And this construct is my own. Within it, I am of value, just as I am. I have to put nothing on. I exploit myself…”

V.S. Naipaul has correctly said that he exploits himself in his writings, specifically in his travel writings. He exploits himself, by experiencing and placing himself among other people, in new lands, new countries. He exploits his thinking by coordinating his thoughts and values, with those of people belonging to other far off lands, by travelling to these places, by interacting with them. He puts himself in a multiculturalistic environment and thus evolves his deeply artistic collection of travelogues.

Naipaul’s travelogues is a result of the kind of freedom, that he achieves, a kind of fluidity that he experiences by being in a multicultural environment, where he experiences different set of place, culture, language, associations and beliefs. It has taught him flexibility to adapt to new situation. It has arisen a sense of intermingling with new environment and as well as comparing it with the perceptions that he has about that particular place. It also applies to the perception that he had about his base, his background or ancestral country, and what he actually experienced when he himself had been there in the land. The multicultural situation that we find in the travelogues of V.S. Naipaul, go somewhat with his personal experience in his life. Naipaul’s multicultural implications have a depth of meaning as a man is actually shaped by the geographical, historical, cultural and racial past or exposures in one’s life.

This research studies the multiculturalism in the travelogues of V.S. Naipaul. The word multiculturalism may theoretically mean, to relate with several cultural or ethnic groups, but it has many farfetched implications. As already mentioned in previous chapters, the word
multiculturalism is a term which is associated with hybridity, mimicry, self-identity, imitation, colonized, third space, cultural translation and displaced exile. The situation of multiculturalism is only possible when one travels and in doing so, he places himself in new situations among people belonging to other varied cultural races. Naipaul, with a complex, diverse, ethnic and colonial background, needs a special kind of concentration, as he himself faced the multicultural situation and also believes in: “…I don’t think any of us can claim that we came from one single enclosed, tribal world. We are little bombarded cells, aren’t we?... Many things occur to make us, what are we surely live with all the things that make us.”

Naipaul correctly stated that each one of us came from a multicultural status due to our circumstances at some stage of our life. This multicultural status often leads to the development of the natural consciousness. It surfaces due to the changed geographical and cultural climate. Today the impact of multiculturalism has led to the formation of an attitude of intermingling into a heterogeneous group. The impact of intermingling has set its influence not only in literature, economics or overseas politics; it is also seen commonly in the global market. That’s why multiculturalism has increased the national conscious. Now a person, especially the expatriate and the diasporic, is called as a universal man, who belongs not to any single country or place but to whole nation. Frantz Fanon correctly comments of this situation when he says:

National consciousness is the only thing that will give us an international dimension... It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the source of all culture... (199)

V.S. Naipaul stands as a perfect example of National citizen. Naipaul’s multiculturalism can be understood from his hybrid identity. Naipaul the native Trinidadian,
is a part yet not a part of English milieu. He is both inclined and excluded from it by birth and
growth, inheritance and history. He can be called as an exiled, who was enmeshed in the
cultural collision. His dislocation from his roots enables him to treat his own alienation as an
instance of his quest for identity of colonial and post colonial people. Naipaul’s ancestors
hailed from India. He was born in Trinidad. He was educated in the mother country and
England remained his second home. Even Trinidad was an alien land for him because he
always felt slightly like a stranger. He could not authentically feel truly at home in one place,
therefore, all of these factors lead to his hybrid identity. He as an exiled writer could create
his own place through travelling and writing. To trace Naipaul’s own location in this vast
frame work is by no means an easy or straight task.

Naipaul remembers his old days of Trinidad and writes: “In the immigrant colonial
society with no standards of its own for years to the second rate..., minds are rigidly closed;
and Trinidadians of all races and classes are remaking themselves...(65)”

Naipaul being enmeshed in multiculturalism, shows his quest, interest in culture and
society of different places, where he travelled, in his different travelogues.

In his first travelogue *The Middle Passage* Naipaul stresses on the colonial society of
West Indies and South America. In this travelogue he treats the enduring effect of Caribbean
society, history of imperial depredation and depletion and colonial marginality. It is about the
clients and the consumers, who have consumed human beings by turning them to slaves. The
book describes the frightening situation of the slaves between Africa and America and the
Voyages of Columbus and other explorers. He draws an ironic view of the society with
regard to the inter-racial situation, man-woman relationships, the culture of Trinidad’s urban
black population.

Naipaul studies that the effect of multiculturalism on the colonial society had the
impact of slavery on them. Here the people had developed an attitude to be left alone. So the
effect of multiculturalism is the development of split identity and isolated attitude. The slavery, the plantation system, the immigration of indentured workers all these exploitation have created an unstable and shaky amalgam of people, who are uncertain of their roots and doubtful of their identity. Naipaul remembering about the colonial society puts very ironically:

The colonial world is a pretty awful world. People have now forgotten it but I still carry it with me a little bit. I grew up at the fag end of imperialism. It was very unpleasant... I haven’t written about personal psychosis at all. I’ve written about real things. (59)

The unique thing about Naipaul is that, he identifies himself with the situation of the place where he visits and relates himself with the position of the people. Naipaul similarly identifies himself with India, in the “Indian Trilogy” as his roots lie in India as it had been the land of fantasy for him, until he visited the place. Naipaul had heard about Indian culture, society and its rich heritage. But later due to his upbringing and many other circumstances, his dreamland India turned to a surprise for him. His experience in India was surprisingly quite annoying for him and he pointed this in *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *India: A wounded Civilization* (1975), and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1993). In all these travelogues he projects his disillusionment, and his painful experience in India. Later he realizes that his upbringing in a foreign land, hindered his actual correlation with his dreamland. His changed attitude towards India can be seen in his third travelogue on India. In his interview with Dileep Padgaonkar, Naipaul speaks in a more mature, broader way, and seems to have given a more friendly thought towards his ancestral land. Extract from Naipaul’s interview proves our point:

What is happening in India is a new, historical awakening. Gandhi used religion in a way as to marshall people for the independence cause... today it
seems to me that Indians are becoming alive to their history... The correct truth is the way invaders, looked at their actions. They were conquering, they were subjugating. And they were in a country where people never understood this... only now are the people beginning to understand that there has been a great vandalizing of India... now however, things seem to be changing. What is happening in India is a mighty creative process... The sense of history that the Hindus are now developing is a new thing...(57-58)

This conversation, contradicts the critical, cogent and spontaneous comment on India, that was given by Naipaul in his Indian Trilogy. It shows that Naipaul is all at praise, and gives an understandable approach to the multicultural land of India, an abode rich in heritage.

We get some more useful insight of Naipaul’s views about third world, especially in his publication, *The Return of Eva Peran* (1974-74). In this travelogue Naipaul attempts to look at the cultural, social, political and other aspects of Trinidad, Argentina and Zaire. These countries share their colonial past. He explores the darkness in these places; which signifies, corruption, illiteracy, exploitation, lack of resources, horror of killings, despair of the people, the poverty stricken masses, unemployment, criminal tendencies and the atmosphere of anarchy. Heuncertains in the dark situation of the third world countries, which as the consequences of the slavery, and poverty stricken people. This poverty was partly due to their unscrupulous, power hungry and corrupt leader. He says that in such type of environment where leadership stands for vague promises, all these lead to violence, humiliation, terror for the common mass. He ironically characterizes such multicultural societies as one where neither the leader nor the led can hope to nourish a future hope of stability or peace; what all is left is a growing sense of futility and terror.

The travelogues that encircled V.S. Naipaul in the dust of controversy were *Among the Believers* and *Beyond Belief* based on his journey made to Islamic countries of Iran,
Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. As already stated, it comes out that Naipaul correlates himself, in some way or the other with the places he visits; may be by his parental roots, or his birth place, his place of flourishing, or with the colonial connection. In this context when it was asked what made Naipaul to travel or to develop an enthusiasm for Islamic countries? Naipaul answers with his ever confidence in an interview:

There were Mohamedans among us in Trinidad. The Indian community there had strong bonds. Incidentally they still do in Guyana. But in Trinidad, you had the Negro movement, a radical movement, headed by Eric William [...] It bought us closer to the Mohamedans. Please understand that my interest is not in Arab Islam. It is in Islam outside the Arab World, in countries conquered by the Arab religion. When my book on these countries was published they wanted an Arab to review it. But what does an Arab know about Malaysia or Pakistan or Iran? (59)

Naipaul, studying the cultural stances of Islamic countries, was quite impressed by the unity of Islam and the diversity of Muslim and Muslim culture while on the other hand Naipaul attacks the Islamic cultural and religious practices. His open criticism of Islamic fundamentalism had made him a centre of strong opposition. He says “Mohamedan fundamentalism is essentially negative...” (58)

Naipaul in his record travel, which comes out as Beyond Belief still seems to have closely studied the Islamic land. He wrote about their rituals, purification, sacrifice, Islamic martyrs, mujahidin, and Taliban issues. For his bold voice, against Islamic issues, Naipaul is looked upon to be champion to the cause of freedom, democracy and self-expression against the closed and barbaric Islamic rites and their negative effects. Naipaul a writer of travel books or cultural explorer through travelling, justifies himself by saying that Beyond Belief is not an anti Islamic work rather he adds:
...Beyond Belief adds to the entire book, takes the story on. It also moves in a different way. It is less of a travel book; the writer is less present, less of an inquirer. He is in the background, trusting his instinct, a discoverer of people, a finder of stories. These stories, opening out one from the other, make their own pattern and define each country and its prompting...(XII)

His study of Islamic multiculturism was based on personal encounters, during his stay and travel and he commented on how the region has turned to Islam. How people have converted to Islam. He studies the pressure of fundamentalist orthodoxy, the rise and fall and expansion of Islam due to Arabian, Persian and Moghul expansion. He also points towards the economic development by new wealth of oil. He points to the deeply troubled issue of gender i.e. women. The travelogues were based on the personal encounter through, interpreters, so they stand for a personal interlude in discovering the Islam.

A Turn in the South describes Naipaul’s journey through the deep South of America. He here explores the multiculturalism based on racism. He explores the exquisitely painful subject: race relation in the South United States and reveals the tragedy of their condition. This travelogue can be read as part of Naipaul’s Slave Society trilogy. It is his journey in search of truth about the ‘race issue’. Naipaul puts his views on racism as such:

...in a racially mixed society, especially one where race is a big issue, the different worlds have racial attributes or overtones. Distinction and differences can have the force of taboos - things sensed rather than consciously worked out. (158)

Naipaul presumes that the racism of the south as an accepted, unconscious force that parameters the culture. He further observes that the southerners engage in rituals of passivity encouraged by the religion they cherish so much, that it perpetuate itself in a way that obstructs meaningful social change. Due to their rituals of passivity, which discourage
intellectual examination of established codes of conduct, many southerners simply cannot see the racism that surrounds them. Naipaul as an outsider, by his text, fulfills his task of calling attention to southern racism by creating a mimetic text that examines that racism while mimicking its clearly drawn line. Naipaul notes in a gloomy way: “…I felt ...that there were two world views here almost, two ways of seeing and feeling that could not be reconciled. And this was depressing...” (58)

Sir Vidiadhar Naipaul was born in Trinidad in 1932, but Port of Spain and the Caribbean could never become his home: the fastidious and ambitious young man found his extended Indian family unbearable. He arrived in England; a triple exile: from India, from Trinidad and from his flesh and blood, Thus he remembers his awful childhood, where due to large family there was too much of malice. The English books of his school, offered the powerful fantasy of a remote and mysterious world. Naipaul’s personality became a juxtaposition of his Indian background, the England imperial brought up and the Caribbean island. He found his voice in his writings, and once he found it, his work flowed, a succession of books that accumulates prizes, readers and admires. Then came a major breakthrough with A House of Mr. Biswas. As he says, the excitement soon exhausted, as he wanted something to happen like “going out”. Here going out means travelling and it succeeded in travelogues. His first recipe was Caribbean and it resulted in The Middle Passage. This was followed with the journey to area of darkness, his ancestral India. It led to his query for the Muslim, and Islam and then again to the colonial, racial environment of South America.

At some instance Naipaul had considered multiculturalism as a racket, making a blistering attack on Britain’s multiculturalism. Later he changes his mood and recognizes his strong inheritance (of multiculturalism) to be his advantage. He puts: “…from the point of view of writing, its been a blessing, because I saw the possibilities. I arrived at the possibilities. I worked towards the possibilities.” (16)
Naipaul through his writing, was able to rediscover a link, between his unknown past and his present self understanding. Naipaul himself dwelling in the different aspects of multiculturalism, travelled and wrote about different ethnic groups, based on different cultural heritage, with different historical specifications. This research had explored the works of V.S. Naipaul, and came across his construction of subjectivity, otherness, complexity of colonial predicament, rupture of identity, sense of alienation of diaspora, which gets reflected in his works. V.S. Naipaul plays a paramount role in the post colonial writings. He has fluidity, multiple and unstable identity, which is the unique perspective of multiculturalism.

V.S. Naipaul shows the impact of this ongoing process of identity loss and identity recovery. He studies by travelling in different places, with different ethnic groups, cultural heritage and history, so as they undergo the condition of dislocation and dispossesson. When someone undergoes such conditions, he consequently faces the problem of identity loss. He quests for a home, and then strives for self discovery or self-realization. The slave colonies, the diasporas and the expatriates and Naipaul himself underwent such circumstances. In the travelogues studied we see the colonials of Caribbean, with the slavery history, the racial and colonial situation of South America; the transformed Muslims, in Islamic countries, where Islam spread due to the influence or pressure of Arabs, Mughals etc. and the Indians who also faced the colonial situation from English and various tribes and races may it be Arabs, Mughals etc who had made India their home at some time or the other, had faced the consequences of multiculturalism.

Naipaul who himself underwent a series of life stages between homelessness and home, vividly portrayed the situation in his works. He wrote to regain his self identity. He denies or negates his Caribbean homeland, adopts a stage of mimicry in England, searches for
his cultural roots in India, and finally reconstructs his identity out of his multicultural uniqueness.

Today Naipaul has come out of the prejudices of multiculturalism, which takes expression in his latest works. In an interview with Dileep Padgaonkar, V.S. Naipaul comments, echoes loudly that he had shattered his multicultural aspect and had redefined himself:

Exactly. The reason is that you carry so many ideas in your mind. Because of the spread of education and the collapse of empires there has been such a great extension of freedom [...] Education and freedom enable you to get away from concerns about roots and identities. (56)

In the study of V.S. Naipaul I have landed up with the following findings:

The study of Vidiadhar Suraj Prasad Naipaul’s works reveal that his contribution to the genre of travel writing has a significant place in literature. His travel writings are a synthesis of history, sociology, ethnography, autobiography, documentary and also reportage. Thus his travel writing in totality is a unique blend of all the above facts.

Naipaul’s multiculturalism has a depth of meaning because every man experiences different set of place, culture, language, association and beliefs. Each one of us is actually shaped by the geographical, historical, cultural and racial past or circumstances.

Naipaul studies state that multiculturalism states that multiculturalism leads to the development of split identity and isolated attitude. To support his point he gives the example of unstable shaky amalgam of people of colonial society.

Naipaul can be looked upon to be a champion to the cause of freedom, democracy and self expression. He never hesitates to point out the fundamentalism in Islam, though it encircled him in the whirl of controversy.
Today Naipaul has come out of the prejudices of multiculturalism which takes expression in his latest works, where he writes: “Education and freedom enable you to get away from concern about roots and identities.” (56)