CHAPTER IV

NAIPaul’S VISION AND STYLE

V.S.Naipaul is, beyond doubt, a great master of fiction and literary device, a craftsman of style and imagery. His art consists in reducing complexities to simple images and creating original descriptions that are pregnant with suggestive possibilities. The author tries constantly to understand human condition. He appears to be worried about man’s inclination towards lying and self-deception in his works.

Naipaul’s achievements outstrip his inadequacies. Few writers match his literary skill. The simplicity, grace and dignity of his prose, the eye for concrete detail, the humour and charm of his early novels, the fine sense of irony, the neatness and clarity of his exposition and above all, his ruthless honesty, all taken together, make him perhaps the most lucid witness of a world in the throes of moral and spiritual uncertainties.

In all his writings Naipaul has focused on individuals attempting to escape fate. For Naipaul, fate belongs to a world of magic, myth and ritual where only the past exists but not history. According to him, it is history that provides a sense of wholeness and belonging to both people and nation. As such his heroes beginning with the boy-narrator of Miguel Street up to Willie Chandran of Half a Life wade through different phases of life and experiences in search of their non-existent histories. The boy-narrator in Street is only too
A stranger could drive through Miguel Street and just say, ‘Slum’ because he could see no more. But we, who lived there, saw our street as a world, where everybody was quite different from everybody else. Man-Man was mad; George was stupid; Big Foot was a bully; Hat was an adventurer; Popo was a philosopher and Morgan was our comedian. (15)

The stuff of *Miguel Street* is made up of such poignant tragic-comic experiences that only a truly humanistic artist like Naipaul can be really aware of them.

Naipaul’s manner of writing in general and the characteristics of his prose in different phases of his career are noteworthy. He owes allegiance to no institution, doctrine or religion. Hence he does not feel obligated to spare anyone. His commitment is to his own vision of life. His magnificent prose, the lucidity of language and felicity of expression grant him an unparalleled position in the world of letters. Harbans, the Hindu candidate in *Suffrage*, is forced to think beyond the interests of his community during his electoral campaign. When he visits Elvira after winning the election and becoming an M.L.C., the Elvirans immediately understand that,

He wasn’t the candidate they knew. He was in a double-breasted gray suit [. . .] He looked pre-occupied, kept his eye on the ground, and when he hawked and spat in the gutter, pulled out an ironed handkerchief and wiped his lips—not even wiped them, patted them—
in the fussiest way. (196-97)

It is the language that charms the readers even when they differ from the author on some of his observations.

Naipaul is involved with ‘the here and now’ of his world, for he sees the flight from reality manifested all around him—especially in the neurosis which afflicts the everyday lives of ordinary Trinidadians and in the psychic make-up of the Indian personality. His scorn for the gulf between the written and spoken English in the West Indies is projected in the dialogue between Ganesh and his wife in Masseur. Ganesh, the masseur is ashamed of his spoken dialect. He tells his wife,

‘Leela, is a high time we realize that we living in a British country and I think we shouldn’t be shame to talk to people language good’

Leela was squatting at the kitchen chulha, coaxing a fire from dry mango twigs. Her eyes were red and watery from the smoke [. . .]. (71)

The contrast between Ganesh, waterlogged with literary aspirations and his wife squatting on a mud floor, is a valid comment on the artificial lives lived by the average Trinidian. Naipaul is distressed by the fantasy which the Trinidadians live out in their day-to-day lives.

Writing for Naipaul is basically an ordering of experience. To him, a writer’s imagination ceaselessly processes and engages in the ordering of his experiences. Landeg White writes, “Naipaul’s is a shaping rather than an
inventive imagination” (24). Fact is shaped into fiction and fiction itself is seen as an understanding of the factual world. Literature and life interpenetrate, fiction and non-fiction complement and counterpoint each other. Many of his novels are well outside the limits of what one expects from a traditional work of fiction. Some are historical, some personal and some traditionally novelistic.

Naipaul’s work is of utmost relevance in today’s world in which everyone is, in one sense or the other, an exile. Naipaul’s single English protagonist, Mr. Stone of Knight’s Companion, reflects the rootlessness and gloom of modern life. With a feeling of emptiness, Stone observes, “the mists gathering in the school ground; the day dying with the feel of the death of the holiday, it seemed that the world was in abeyance” (31). Naipaul’s imagery, here, evokes a sombre stillness and lifelessness which capture Stone’s mood of utter desolation. The experience of being an exile in his own native land paves the way for a better understanding and awareness in Mr. Stone. In Naipaul, it has meant a clear-eyed assessment of his position as a writer.

The impetus behind Naipaul’s writing is to understand his own situation. It is through his writing that he arrives at a vision of modern homelessness as a product of historical forces and to an acceptance of his own homelessness as final. He has also arrived at a perception that his own plight is not singular but is typical of the postcolonial world. The perception and anguish at his own displacement and rootlessness is central to his creative talent and it has been the stimulus as well as the subject of his work.

Unlike those who dream of imaginary homelands to adjust to the trauma of displacement, Naipaul has opted for homelessness. He chose to occupy this
uncertain zone as a comfortable position to speak from. As a man without a nation, choosing residence in a nation that is not his own, he defies ‘nationness’ itself. He is the mimic man who turns his master’s tools both against the master and his own people. He is the man without a home, a stranger, at home in a homeless universe.

In Naipaul’s vision of the world, pessimism may be said to be a central strain, while his commitment to truth is uncompromising. As his vision matures, it becomes increasingly pessimistic with his own growing sense of disillusionment. As an observer and interpreter of ex-colonies, he is unspARINGLY critical and exposes the inadequacies of such societies, which he believes to be the outcome of the unconscious acceptance of the norms and values of the colonizing culture.

Naipaul’s early novels happen to be the liveliest of all his works. Yet one can sense in them the pain and distress even in the midst of laughter. Naipaul himself acknowledges the fact in an interview, where he says, “Even my funniest novels were all begun in the blackest of moods, out of a sense of personal anguish and despair” (Newsweek 18 Aug.1980). It is the personal nature of anguish experienced by him that defines his attitude and sets the tone of all his novels.

Though there is much laughter in Miguel Street, one of his early novels, the stories demonstrate that the world is a stupid, sad place and the narrator realizes this through the character of Laura, the prostitute. She is the most vivacious and gay person in the street, but when her daughter becomes pregnant before marriage, her defences crumble and she begins to cry: “And
for the first time I heard Laura crying. It wasn't ordinary crying. She seemed to
be crying all the cry she had saved up since she was born; all the cry she had
tried to cover up with her laughter” (115). The narrator’s comment shows that
laughter is only one of the masks of bravado that the characters wear to hide
the bitter realities of their lives.

Landeg White quotes Naipaul’s statement in an interview, “If through the
comedy you can’t see the central tragedy, then the comedy isn't very good” (33). True to his words, Naipaul never allows his readers to lose sight of the
central tragedy in the comic lives of the residents of Miguel Street.

The Swedish Academy praised Naipaul’s distinct style in which the
customary distinction between fiction and non-fiction are of subordinate
importance. The thematic and genre aspects of Naipaul’s works reveal a
cosmos of borderlines. The subject-matter of his novels and travel- writings is
the constant negotiation of where the individual is situated: country or city,
inside the community or outside, within tradition or outside and in the
colonized world or postcolonial societies. The truth that emerges out of these
writings is Naipaul’s stance on displaced individuals, uprooted and without a
distinct place called ‘home’ but longing for it all the same.

Many of Naipaul’s fictional figures are at the mercy of social and political
forces and also their own personal compulsions. They remain ‘unhoused’ in
themselves and are, therefore, located on the borderlines of fixed and shifting
identities, living half-lives prescribed by the colonial and postcolonial
experience.
Naipaul’s first real achievement, *House for Mr. Biswas*, opens with the image of an old, derelict man completely at the mercy of what he believes is his destiny:

Bipti’s father, futile with Asthma, propped himself up on his string bed and said, as he always said on unhappy occasions, ‘Fate. There is nothing we can do about it . . .’

No one paid him any attention. Fate had brought him from India to the sugar estate, aged him quickly and left him to die in a crumbling mud hut in the swamplands; yet he spoke of Fate often and affectionately, as though, merely by surviving, he had been particularly favoured.

The author’s attitude is tender but ironic. Survival is the only objective of the old man and he does it with the passive acceptance, which Naipaul sees as the dominating trait of the Indian personality.

The full impact of Naipaul’s work cannot be gauged in a vacuum but must be seen against the background of the social forces he scrutinizes. Naipaul consciously invokes comedy in order to say something deeply and seriously felt regarding a social predicament. He claims in an uncharacteristically cautious fashion that his work aims at social comment and criticism. He does not seek to produce social propaganda but sees the act of literary creation as being deeply involved with the desire to produce observations of a sociological nature. According to him, “the novelist works towards conclusions of which he is often unaware; and it is better that he should be” (*Passage 5*).
The dual role of the narrator as an “involved witness and omniscient observer” (Kamra 123) provides Naipaul with ample scope and full freedom to delineate his characters in a vivid and subtle manner. Most of his characters are made available to the reader directly as the narrator enters their consciousness and exposes them. There is an ironic contrast between what the characters think and feel and what they say and do. In addition to the peep that one gets into the psyche of the characters, they are also subjected to further assessment through their perceptions about one another.

In *Mystic Masseur*, the narrator weaves the story of Ganesh, the masseur-cum-mystic-cum-writer-cum-politician. He reveals that Ganesh’s career from the quack masseur, to a fake mystic, to a phoney author and finally to a corrupt politician records an allegory of “the history of our times” (18). Ganesh’s innovative election campaign is quoted as,

He held no election meetings, but Swami and Pratap arranged many prayer meetings for him. He worked hard to expand his *Road to Happiness* lectures; three or even four taxis had to take the books he required. Quite casually, in the middle of a lecture, he would say in Hindi, ‘It may interest one or two of you in this gathering tonight to hear that I am a candidate for the elections next month. I can promise nothing. In everything I shall consult God and my conscience, even at the risk of displeasing you. But that is by the way. We were talking, you remember, about the transmigration of the souls [. . .]’ (199)

At every turn, the reader meets with the sardonic, yet true comments about the activities of Ganesh on his journey towards success.
It is easy to deduce that Naipaul’s impatience is directed towards the intellectual and cultural parasitism and the mimicry of the West, which are the maladies common to all the ex-colonial societies of the post-imperial period. In the early novels the same shortcomings are viewed sympathetically but in the later ones his criticism becomes markedly acidic. It is as though Naipaul has started to feel that it requires something more vigorous than sympathy to ease the ex-colonials out of their complacent attitudes.

Two contrary statements made by him support such a presumption. In his conversation with Israel Shankar, in 1971, he said: “As you grow older, you understand people a lot more; you have greater sympathy with people, you enter into them much more” (54). Seven years later, one hears him saying to Drozdiak, “My sympathy for the defeated, the futile, the abject, the idle and the parasitic gets less and less as I grow older” (Time 27 Feb. 1978). It becomes obvious that Naipaul’s brutal analysis of the postcolonial societies is meant as a kind of shock treatment which he believes is necessary to pull the ex-colonials out of their complacency and make them accept responsibility for themselves because it is only then that de-colonization in its real sense can become possible.

Upto House, Naipaul’s major concern seems to be to reconstruct his past and establish his home identity because a home was then perceived as a major limitation. Subsequent to his disappointment with India, however, Naipaul begins to perceive the concepts of identity and home in a new light. Homelessness is now seen as a boon rather than a bane because a whole world of possibilities opens up to people without a side. It is Naipaul’s notable
achievement that “he has made the Caribbean experience an integral strand in the pattern of human condition” (Singh 348).

His novel, *House for Mr. Biswas*, depicts the success story of its hero within the limited environment of Trinidad. The novel, in a sense, presents the social history of the East Indians in Trinidad. *House* is epic in scope and tells the story of Mohan Biswas from birth till death. There is a general agreement among critics that Hanuman House is a miniature version of the plantation system introduced by the colonizers. The description of the organization of the Hanuman house in the novel justifies the analogy:

The organization of the Hanuman House was simple. The daughters and their children swept and washed and cooked and served in the house. The husbands under Seth’s supervision worked on the Tulsi land, looked after the Tulsi animals and served in the store. In return they were given food, shelter, and a little money; their children were looked after. (97)

Naipaul, here, suggests that traditional institutions like the extended family are equally responsible for perpetuating dependence and passivity by suppressing individuality. They are the major deterrents to the development of personality. He has once described the joint family in which he grew up as “a microcosm of the authoritarian state where power is all important” (Michener 108).

A similar tone of the ironic detachment as well as the third person omniscient point of view that Naipaul adopts, serve to expose the vices of the society and secure the readers’ censure in *Suffrage of Elvira* too. *Suffrage* is a
sustained piece of narrative, while the novels preceding it were episodic and loose-knit. His skill as a novelist surfaces in passages where Naipaul subtly exposes the vices of the society and at once directs the readers’ response. The presentation of the characters is such that none of them, except perhaps Foam, elicit a sympathetic response from the readers:

Things were crazily mixed up in Elvira. Everybody, Hindus, Muslims and Christians owned a Bible; the Hindus and Muslims looking on it, if anything, with greater awe. Hindus and Muslims celebrated Christmas and Easter. The Spaniards and some of the Negroes celebrated the Hindu festival of lights. Someone had told them that Lakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity, was being honoured; they placed small earthen lamps on their moneyboxes and waited, as they said, for the money to breed. (66)

While portraying the disintegration of the East Indians, Naipaul provides a close view of the society. In a society dominated by materialistic values, it is inevitable that conventional customs should yield to political interests and his attempt is to expose the pervasive influence of social beliefs on political moves in Trinidad. While Naipaul’s view about culture is progressive, there is at the same time a regret at the passing away of the old order. In Area of Darkness, he confesses, “the thought of the decay of the old customs and reverences saddened me” (36).

It is not as if the author does not find any redeeming qualities in the Colonies. Naipaul recognizes the noble qualities of loyalty and tenderness in the characters of Foam and Herbert in Suffrage. Foam’s loyalty to Harbans and
Herbert’s tenderness towards the puppy would never have found a place in the novel otherwise. The idea the author seeks to put across is that though noble human qualities are as much present in Trinidad, as anywhere else, they cannot flower in the stultifying colonial environment of places like Trinidad.

After the first four novels, there seems to be a new awareness in Naipaul about the responsibilities of a writer. Consequently, there is a marked difference in approach, tone and themes in the later ones. One notices a broadening of vision as Naipaul moves outside himself and explores other cultures and societies. In his later works the familiar Naipaulian themes of alienation, identity crisis and mimicry are viewed in a broader perspective. Naipaul is, at the same time, preoccupied with the broader postcolonial themes of power, freedom and neocolonialism in the emergent nations of the Third World and hence one finds these later novels to be intensely political.

A striking feature that characterizes Naipaul’s later fiction beginning with *Mimic Men* upto *Bend in the River* is its intensely political nature. There is a clear shift of focus to the post-imperial Third World scenario so much so that individuals are reduced to political beings and social situation as a whole is described in terms of power politics.

In all of Naipaul’s works, inferiority of postcolonial societies remains a fixed idea. One finds a reiteration of this idea in *Flag on the Island* too when Blackwhite tells Frankie that had Churchill been born on the island, even he would have ended up “importing sewing machines and exporting cocoa” (132). Naipaul intends to make it clear that the society plays a major role in moulding an individual’s potentialities by providing avenues for development. Ralph
Singh in *Mimic Men* also learns the lesson the hard way. When he becomes a politician he realizes too late that unskilled mob cannot be the source of real power. “I no longer seek to find beauty in the lives of the mean and the oppressed” (142).

When Naipaul decides to direct his gaze towards postcolonial societies other than Trinidad, his novels become progressively bleak. This tendency reaches its climax in *Guerrillas* and in *Bend in the River*. These novels hold up an utterly desolate vision of the world. In *Guerrillas*, desolation is writ large on the landscape itself. Set in a drought-ridden Caribbean island, the book opens into what sounds like Eliot’s “Waste Land”. The people who inhabit this ‘waste land’ are quite in tune with it. They are derelicts, morally and intellectually barren.

In contrast to the arid barrenness of the backdrop presented in *Guerrillas*, the background of *Bend* has a choking fertility though the vision of the world remains essentially the same. It is the vision of a world undoing itself. *Bend* also holds out little hope and ends on the terrifying thought that “nowhere is safe now” (282). In the novel there is a considerable difference in Naipaul’s treatment of Africa. Not only is he more sympathetic but there is also a sincere attempt on his part to analyze and arrive at an understanding of the problems that grip post-independent Africa. The portrayal of African characters caught in the slipstream of history has also been done in a convincing manner.

Jimmy’s character in *Guerrillas* is launched as a foil to expose the farce and futility of the Black Power Movements in the Caribbean islands. The title of the novel carries ironic overtones. It is evident from the ineffectual way the
guerrillas presented in the novel function. Naipaul makes it plain that in inorganic and racially divided societies like the Caribbean, there can be no authentic internal source of power. In a picaroon society like the one depicted in the novel, everyone is a guerilla —“a privateer” (Neil 27)— fighting for his own little cause.

The guerrillas one meets in the novel -- Roche, Jane, Jimmy and the boys at the Commune--- are derelicts who have no sense of purpose in life and only just “carry-on”. The impermanence of the world is reinforced through Jimmy’s realization that, “There are no more mansions. I suppose like everyone else, I fooled myself that there was a mansion waiting somewhere for me [. . .]” (87). Like their quest for identity and freedom, Naipaul’s characters’ search for power also meets with failure. For Jimmy the quest ends in a fiasco and for Jane it proves to be fatal. Roche only just manages to escape from the island and save himself. To Naipaul, the post-imperial world has no centre. Both the former colonizers as well as the colonized are at the margins of power but each identifies the centre with the other.

Naipaul’s vision, thus, offers little hope to the third world societies that have been maimed beyond repair. Through his depiction of London in *Bend*, he puts forward the view that displacement and alienation are a universal predicament in the post-war world. One must learn to live with this ultimate truth. Salim, the hero of the novel, arrives at this piece of wisdom the hard way and he decides to rejoin the world because, “The world is what it is: men who have nothing, have no place in it” (143).

In Naipaul’s terms, then, the solution is to be had at the individual level
through self-de-colonization -- by overcoming the colonial mentality of idleness and irresponsibility. The difference between Jimmy and Salim lies in the fact that the former is unable to break away from the colonial state of dependence and vents out his frustration in an empty gesture of violence, whereas Salim, because of his acquired habit of self-appraisal, knows where exactly he stands and his insights make him take the positive step of rejoining the world.

In Bend, Ferdinand’s parting words to Salim encapsulate Naipaul’s vision of the world. “Nobody’s going anywhere. We’re all going to hell and every man knows this in his bones. We’re being killed. Nothing has any meaning. That is why everyone is frantic. Everyone wants to make his money and run away. But where?” (281-82).

In spite of the pessimistic vision it imposes, Bend is a much more rewarding novel compared to Guerrillas, due to its human concern. Through the rich array of characters, Naipaul successfully delineates the complexities of modern life and demonstrates his dexterity in his sensitive handling of the characters.

As Naipaul’s art matures, an increasing importance is given to ideas and he becomes more concerned with thought, meaning and philosophy. Simultaneously, style and structure lose importance. This is apparent from what Naipaul himself says on the subject. “As you grow older you begin to write more profoundly; You are thinking less of the way the words lie on the paper, and more of the meanings, the timing, the emphasis—not thinking of style or language at all; just the effect [. . .]. I am more concerned with thought, meaning, philosophy” (Times Literary Supplement 2 Sept. 1994). For the most
part, the mood that haunts his later works is one of existential despair. As Sashi Kamra observes, “It is similar to existential absurdity; of anguish at living in an unrelated meaningless world; in a void” (37).

On the whole, the later novels hold out little hope for the third World countries and what emerges is a bleak apocalyptic vision of the world. The faint glimmer of hope seen at the end of *Mimic Men* dies out in *Guerrillas*. At the end of *Men*, Singh has arrived at self-knowledge and is prepared to begin life afresh, while *Half a Life* concludes with Willie’s positive gesture of involvement. In *Guerrillas*, however, hope is totally withdrawn. *Bend*, despite its pessimistic portrayal of Africa, concludes on a positive note with Salim rejoining the world.

Travel, indeed, proved to be an important stimulus for the further development of Naipaul’s art. For, it not only helped him to overcome his uncertainties but also enabled him to find his vision. This explains the marked shift in emphasis from the earlier preoccupations of a rather personal nature, to the broader and more general ones that emerge in the works belonging to the second phase of his career. In addition to the broadening of vision, there is an essential difference in approach that draws a clear line between the novels of the two phases.

Significantly, Naipaul’s writings in the post-independence period tends to be serious and reflective. He examines the postcolonial societies and the conclusions he arrives at therein find a restatement in his novels. In these works, Naipaul surfaces as a writer of the post-imperial crisis. His despair is effectively conveyed in the grim and humourless tone one finds in the later works. His vision of the world, henceforth, becomes progressively bleak and the
Naipaul is a traveller, a cosmopolitan with a universal philosophy. He is a specialist when it comes to describing societal changes and intolerance, fanaticism and religious fundamentalism and defeat and failure. But he is also the minimum hope for the remnants of a culture’s pride and self-respect. He collects stories that become scenic remembrances in his books. They are the scripts taken out of real life and are also the researched history combined with imagination as is manifest in the description of the world pulsating with life in his pages.

The critics Dissanayake and Wickramagamage write about his skills in observation in Among the Believers:

He has the well-trained and sensitive eye of the artist with which to record the breath-taking beauty of these short summer landscapes in the mountainous regions of Himalayas. His eye for the telling detail is extended to his descriptions of the people too. So it is that he manages to outline vividly a portrait of the Afghan herdsman whose manner and physique obviously intrigue him. (84)

Before, during and after his many journeys, Naipaul has made overt and covert observations on nations, cultures, communities and races which have forced world-wide attention on him and his work. His books testify to his power as a shrewd delineator of people, settings and situations. They reflect his unusual talent for the telling detail and penetrating observation based on it.

Naipaul’s travel passages include ethnographic details and literary
images, written in a journalistic style. In his travel passages, he gives both authenticity and literariness to his narrative and embeds them with shades of ironic tones of disapproval.

The passage from *Free State* puts forward his use of ethnographic detail and narrative skill in a very convincing and realistic fashion: “At a twist in the road ahead, where the bare verge widened and rose and fell away, half a dozen domestic animals stood together, silhouetted against the sky. But two turned out to be naked children. Dull-eyed, disfigured with mud, they stood where they were and watched the car pass” (205). The grotesque representation abounds in cynicism and satire. It may be noted that Naipaul’s images, compulsive and naked, are also extraordinarily and extravagantly wrought out. There is no room for humour. He is more blunt and critical and chooses to employ darker shades of cynicism.

Certainly the tone has changed since *Miguel Street*. One can see the new tone of extreme pessimism embedded very firmly in his travel narratives. He has incorporated his travel paradigms into his fiction. He has also integrated strands of irony, themes of pessimism and dissolution of his fiction into his travel writings. The passage from *Middle Passage* illustrates his new technique clearly:

Pursuing the Christian—Hellenic tradition, the West Indian accepted his blackness as his guilt. He never seriously doubted the validity of the prejudices from which he suffered, for he had inherited the prejudices of the culture to which he aspired. In the French territories he aimed at Frenchness, in the Dutch territories at Dutchness; in the
English territories he aimed at simple whiteness and modernity, Englishness being impossible. (68)

The new Naipaul has become more blunt and critical. The sentences are short, the ideas compact and the prose convincing. On the back jacket of An Area, Nicholas Mosley praises his inimitable style, “A highly skilful writer [. . .] he spins his webs, his patterns, not so much to entrap the reader, as to make him think for himself” (Listener 22 Mar.1968).

In formal terms, Naipaul experiments along the boundaries of fiction and non-fiction in his travel-writings. While his novels are characterized by his own experiences and the ethos of the community he belongs to, in his travel-writings he frequently tries to keep himself out of the picture but still constitutes the soul of the narrative. He exhibits his power of narrative by making his readers share the inevitable irony and paradox of modern life torn by its quintessential self-division and inner conflict.

Hence his travel-writing exhibits varied aspects like his unerring observation, aggressive mode of assessment, concern for the weak, sympathy for the suffering, and his genuine evaluation of men, manners and development of the country he visits. And above all, they express in vehement terms his intolerance of lethargy, irresponsibility and passivity. He comments in India: A Wounded Civilization,

The poor are needed as hands, as labour; but the city was not built to accommodate them. One report says that 100,000 people sleep on the pavements in Bombay; but this figure seems low. And the
beggars: are there only 20,000 in Bombay, as one newspaper article says, or are there 70,000, the figure given on another day? (56)

The author’s unerring observation and sense of justice come out convincingly in the words.

*Middle Passage*, his first travel-narrative, also testifies to the fact that he is no longer indulgent but has become more blunt and critical. The passage from the book makes an obvious representation: “So we started tramping through the hot dust. The smell of dog-dirt was inescapable, as was the sight of starved mongrels locked in copulation, their faces blank and foolish. Few of the children I saw were without some skin disease; one or two were deformed” (111). Naipaul mercilessly offers here the journalistic pithy statement -- the fact and the detail. His condensed, short, factual and right to the point style perhaps sounds jarring and distressing.

In his first travel book on India, *Area of Darkness*, Naipaul uses a similar technique of including ethnographic details and literary images to project his impressions of disillusionment about his ancestral land. The lines, “A child was squatting in the mud of the street; the hairless pink-skinned dog waited for the excrement. The child, big-bellied, rose; the dog ate” (215), depict strongly the author’s distaste and horror of dirt and lack of hygiene which he experienced in India.

Another poignant passage exposes his disappointment and anguish at the loss of a dream that was India. “Nowhere do I see the India I know: those poor fields, those three-legged dogs, those sweating red-coated railway porters
carrying heavy tin trunks on their heads [. . .]” (71).

When Naipaul visited India again in 1975, he addresses it as “a wounded civilization”. Thus, the Trinidad Indian says in *India: A Wounded Civilization*, “No civilization was so little equipped to cope with the outside world; no country was so easily raided and plundered, and learned from its disasters” (8). The author points his fingers at the Indian habit of passive acceptance of denial, degradation and destruction. Dealing with the intellectual depletion of Indians, Naipaul says that it is the outcome of the ignorance and mean-mindedness of the natives. The lines, “It may be said, rather, that for too long, as a conquered people, they have been intellectually parasitic on other civilization” (134), focus on the intellectual fragility of India. The author’s innate cynicism helps in aggravating his anger towards the land which he chooses to view with a western eye.

*Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* is claimed to be his most crafted travel narrative in terms of the integration of travel strategies and techniques along with fictional elements. The book advocates Naipaul’s theory of ‘universal civilization’ skillfully. Here, he examines the western prejudices against the alternative cultural and political ideologies offered by Islamic fundamentalism. Yet his critical eye seems to be as sharp as ever as is evident in the passage:

These women, wives, were workers; they were beasts of burden like the women of the Dakota Indians, Parkman saw on the Oregon Trail in 1846. But these Afghans and all these mountain tribes, lived in terrain that only they could master. Noone could say of them, as Parkman
could say of the Dakota Indians, that they were going to be wiped off the face of the earth. (187)

The imaginative and creative use of caricatures remains an important feature of Naipaul’s works. He uses it as a socio-critical tool. Throughout his work, from his early Trinidadian novels to his latest African, Indian and Asian adventures, the use of caricatures has been one of his formidable signatures. His sense of humour is evident even in the midst of terror and torture. It is one of the ways in which a true artist can portray and refine his rage and emit his opinion in a world of turmoil. Naipaul’s caricature of the dog in the novel Bend reads as follows:

And then a large Doberman came bounding out at me. The man with the fork said, ‘Don’t worry. He’ll miss you. He can’t see very well. A foreigner’s dog. He gave it to me when he went away’. It was as he said. The Doberman missed me by about a foot, ran on a little way, stopped, raced back and then was all over me, wagging his docked tail, beside himself with joy at my foreigner’s smell, momentarily mistaking me for somebody else. (260)

The dog for Naipaul is a ‘colonial dog’. He is a subject of the colonist, wagging his tail in obedience, careful always to please his master. Above all, the sentence “He can’t see very well” oozes Naipaulian satire unmistakably. The dog certainly is a mocking representation of the colonized who is generally easily confused, fooled and lacks any clear-cut vision of the situation.

It is Naipaul’s strong conviction that in the context of his themes, the use
of caricatures abounding in irony and satire would help more than the propagandist tendencies adopted by most of the West Indian writers.

In Naipaul’s works, there is a constant awareness of the past of the West Indies steeped in slavery. But it is only one of the many strands that informs his larger vision. However, it has enabled him to find a place among writers of the mainstream. He has created many memorable characters and incidents. Mr. Biswas’s relentless fight against an uncompromising fate, Mr. Stone’s futile search for purpose in his old age, Ralph Singh’s ultimate picture as an almost defeated recluse, Salim’s helplessness and Jim’s wickedness, Sandra’s and Jane’s pitiable search for an anchor in their lives are some of the frames which refuse to leave the minds of the readers.

Naipaul’s prose is highly readable and his style is distinct to the point of being inimitable. An interesting feature of Naipaul’s prose style is its slow and stately rhythm:

It was only early spring and on some mornings there was fresh snow on the mountains. The lake was cold and clear; you could see the fish feeding like the land animals on the weeds and on the lake bed and when the sun came out every fish cast a shadow; the clouds fell over the mountains, sometimes in a level bank, sometimes shredding far into the valleys. (Area 106)

The measured tone reflects aesthetic solidity and grants to it the status of fact. Naipaul stands out for his restraint and purity of style in comparison with the unbridled excess of some of his contemporaries.
Naipaul’s success lies in the fact that he has convincingly forged a distinct authorial voice of his own through his eclectic, experimental play with various literary forms. This has resulted in his success in handing down his own unique way of ‘looking’ which differs from book to book. Describing the plight of slavery in Surinam in *Middle Passage*, Naipaul quotes Stedman to illustrate his own idea of slavery in the island:

Yet one needs a strong stomach to read Stedman today. The Surinam he describes is like one concentration camp, with the difference that visitors are welcome to look around and make notes and sketches. The slave owner had less on his conscience than the concentration camp commandant: the world was divided into black and white, Christian and heathen. White might conceivably expected to show some scruples in his relations with black; but the Christian had no such inhibition in his relations with the heathen. (203)

Naipaul works in transparent modes, documenting concrete particulars in a spare style so that he provides his readers with immediate access to actual situations. He does not believe in making them work their way through levels of interlocking images to find meaning. It is this simple elegance of his prose style that has earned him the reputation of being a deft and discerning witness. The press release of the Nobel Prize comments, that “he transforms rage into precision and allows events to speak with their own inherent irony” (Press Release 11 Oct.2001).

Naipaul strongly believes that literature is an expression of society. His fictional world is concerned with the realistic portrayal of individuals, cultures
and societies. His recurrent themes are colonial psychosis, clash of cultures and search for identity. But this truthful portrayal of the various weaknesses of the society does not lack in art. His works are beautifully laced with poetic beauty and grandeur.

Naipaul is of the opinion that an artist is to construct something meaningful out of brute reality. Hence, his main business as a writer is to neglect utterly the dream and fantasy of romantic euphoria and put in their place, the dry and hard facts of day-to-day life. One can very well see that his works are the testimony to his success in fulfilling his mission as a writer in undisputable terms.