CONCLUSION

V. S. Naipaul’s writings have garnered much critical attention and praise. His fictional works have been read and re-read over the years from diverse critical and theoretical perspectives. Some postcolonial writers who are interested in the formation of postcolonial identities have pointed out Naipaul’s analysis of such issues in his novels. Issues of exile, diasporic identities, nation formation and the relationship between center and periphery have been dealt by Naipaul in his fictional narratives. Social, political, racial, and ethnic tensions between different socio-religious groups in former colonies have been the focus of his literary gaze. It is in this context that he has been hailed by some in the Western world as the interpreter of postcolonial societies. His diagnosis of the corruption of the former colonies in Africa, South America, and Asia have been lauded as ‘objective’ and ‘disinterested’ interpretation of the ill of those societies. In addition to fictional narratives, Naipaul has enriched the world literature with travel narratives and journalistic pieces which he considered as important as his novels. Therefore, in recognition of his contribution to the world of letters, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001.

Though literary critics and theorists have almost unanimously admired him for his talents as a brilliant writer of English language, his opinions and ideas have been received very differently by them. Writers in Anglo-American world have praised him as the interpreter of the societies of the former colonies. However, most of the writers of the Third World have taken a very critical stance against Naipaul’s opinions and ideas about the former colonies. They have pointed out that his political ideology is tainted by outright racist and colonial discourse. His depiction of Indian, African, and, especially Islam and Muslim countries, are said to be influenced by his colonial education. He has been seen as a ‘brown sahib’ who had a life-long nostalgia for empire. This critique has been especially made in relation to his writings on Islam and, what he himself called, “the rage of Islam”. Following this critical and colonial
discourse theory, I have argued that in the political atmosphere of late twentieth
century Naipaul’s depiction of “Islam” as an anti-thesis of the “Western”
‘universal civilization’ has functioned as a contemporary version of the
nineteenth century colonial discourse which was and still is designed to justify
and legitimize neoimperial and exploitative power relations between West and
the Muslim countries. Late twentieth century saw increasing Euro-American
and Israeli military interventions in the Middle East and in other Muslim
countries around the world. Israeli settler colonialism in the historical
Palestine, American intervention in Iran during and after Iranian Revolution in
1979, Euro-American intervention in Afghan resistance against Soviet Union,
American invasion and NATO bombarding of Iraq and Libya are some of the
critical political events that pitted the militarily powerful Western nations,
headed by US and Israel, against some of the Muslim countries in and outside
the Arab world. Establishment writers and Orientalists like Lewis and
Huntington formulated their theories of “rage” and “revolt” of Islam. They
portrayed resistance movements of Muslims, which drew on Islam as source of
revolutionary ideology, as “Islamic fundamentalism”, and claimed a “clash of
civilizations” involving “open”, “rational”, and “democratic” West on one side
and “closed”, “irrational” and “primitive” Islam. This binary characterization
of Islam and West acted as an explanatory category with which the supporters
of American imperial structure justified their military buildup and interventions
in the Middle East.

My theoretical position is that in order to better understand Naipaul’s
Islamic travelogues we cannot discount this overarching neoimperial and settler
colonialism which has shaped and circumscribed the debates around Islam and
Muslims. During this period old Orientalist images, stereotypes, tropes, and
ideas about the Islamic Orient resurfaced in the mainstream Euro-American
world with a new vigor. Orientalists like Lewis began to explain “the Muslim
mind” to the Western readership, and put forward the politically charge
polemic about “the roots of Muslim rage”. Naipaul too, I have maintained,
contributed to this demonization of Islam by his own version of “rage” and
“revival” polemic. His Islamic travelogues and his nonfiction writings like
“Our Universal Civilization” gave new steam to the old Orientalist dichotomy
between “progressive” West and “primitive” Islam. His writings about Iran,
Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia are full of dogmatic assertions about the
supposed backwardness of Islam and the civilization it gave rise to. He
associated problematic ideas like “neurosis”, “rage”, “fantasy”, and
“irrationality” with the political movements of Muslims, and argued that the
main source of the Muslim “rage” is Islam. According to him, Islam is a
dangerous form of “colonization” which he thought is planning to take over the
rest of the world. He represented Islam as an “anti-intellectual” and an
“uncreative” force that has destroyed the creative energies among its adherents.
Against this stereotypical image of Islam, he portrays the West as a “universal
civilization” which, he believed, represents the perfection of human
civilization. This civilization is “rational”, “intellectual”, “scientific”, “open”,
“tolerant” and “accommodating”; in other words, it is everything which Islam
is not. Naipaul connects these images and ideas to argue that the most
important “enemy” of the “western” civilization is this “rage” and “revival of
Islam”. By using Edward Said’s writings on Orientalism and the relationship
between cultural forms and imperialism, I have argued that Naipaul’s
representation of Islam and Muslim anticolonial political movements draws
heavily on the nineteenth century Orientalist portrayals of Muslims as
“primitive” people who threaten the balance of the “civilized” West.

I have situated Naipaul’s writings on Islam within the late twentieth
century historical moment characterized by neoimperial reconfiguration which
is headed by the only world super power, US. I have linked his political ideas
with those of new cold-warriors who posited “Islam” as a “threat” to the West.
After the demise of the Soviet Union, they replaced the ‘red peril’ with ‘green
peril’. I have maintained that this portrayal of Islam as a negative force in
history is not an isolated aberration; rather it is the mainstream notion, and it is
given a cultural legitimacy by writers like V. S. Naipaul. I have not taken the position that there are no militant Islamist movements in the Muslim world; there are as there are in other religions and places. Even “our universal civilization” has its own share of militant organizations that draw on religion for the legitimacy of their causes. Nazis, neo-Nazis, Evangelical Zionists, Jewish Zionists, Hindutva fanatics are some of the other militant organizations that use religion as a legitimizing force. My point is that Naipaul’s obsession with the “rage of Islam” and his idea that “faith” of Muslims around the world is the sole cause of the “neurosis” and “rage” of those communities is fundamentally flawed and untenable. It is a highly motivated and an ideological stand masqueraded as an “expert” and “objective” reportage. After Mahmood Mamdani, I have called this approach Cultural Talk: a kind of cultural determinism that purports to explain social, political, and economic phenomenon on the basis of some kind of a cultural essence. This culturalist argument is an affirmation of irreducible unique traits of culture or faith that are said to determine the course of history or civilization. For Naipaul this transhistorical category is “Islam”: an ideological construction which he uses to explain everything that happens in the Muslim world.

Since my claim is that cultural forms like travelogues cannot be explained without taking into consideration the larger political, historical and imperial context within which travel and travel writing takes place, in my first chapter titled “Culture, Travel, and Imperialism” I have given an account of how and when was Asia subordinated by European colonial powers. I have pointed out that the colonized spaces were not only politically and economically subjugated; their cultural, spiritual and intellectual life was also disrupted and looked down upon by the colonial powers who considered themselves superior. I have maintained that colonization altered not only their economies but their ways of life, feeling, and their structures of thought were also changed. I have argued that though physical and psychological violence is at the heart of colonialism, the legitimizing discourses are formed in and
through cultural expressions. I have claimed that there is a deep symbiotic relationship between colonial power relations and cultural forms that narrativize the colonial setting and ideology.

Chapter II is called “Naipaul, Clash of Civilizations and Resurgence of Empire”. In this chapter I have shown that Naipaul’s construction of the binary between ‘universal’ West and ‘parasitic’ Islam is a part of late twentieth century Orientalist discourse represented by people like Lewis and Huntington. It has been argued that during the last decades of twentieth century American interventions in the Muslim world were part of the neoimperial power relations that were forming during and after the end of the Cold War. In such a situation, I have maintained, Naipaul’s representation of Islam as ‘reactionary’ and ‘anti-modern’ and West as an “open” and “universal civilization” has given credence to the ‘clash of civilization thesis’ that has been used by policy think tanks to influence American foreign policy with regard to the Muslim world. This has created an image of Islam as a threat, which is subsequently used to justify further military interventions in the Muslim world.

In the third chapter “Islam, West, and V. S. Naipaul’s Construction of Islam as a ‘Threat’” I have argued that V. S. Naipaul constructed the binary opposition between essentialized forms of “Islam” and “West” at a time of intense political unrest between some Muslim nations and the US-Israel colonial policies in the Middle East. It has also been stated that his representation of Islam as an uncompromising form of “imperialism” and “colonization” is a projection of aims and methods of US colonial and neoimperial power relations that were accruing during the last few decades of twentieth century. I have argued that Naipaul, like Lewis and Huntington, has used old Orientalist clichés to portray Islam as a threat to the balance not only of its adherents but also of the Western civilization. I add that as a new Orientalist, Naipaul performed the task of ‘informing’ the West about culture
of Islam so that it would be easy for the Western governments to ‘understand’ and, then, to control the Muslim lands.

Chapter IV is titled as “Naipaul and India’s Islamic History: An Assessment”. This chapter has looked at Naipaul’s attitude towards Muslim presence in India, and I have maintained that his treatment of Islamic history of India was shaped by the preconceptions and assumptions derived from the history written by historians of the Raj. In other words, I have shown how the nineteenth century colonial historiography has informed Naipaul understands of Indian history and how, as a result of that, he portrayed India’s Islamic past a long night of darkness.

In this thesis I have essentially maintained that the project of anticolonial critique needs to be strengthened and fully articulated, particularly in relation to defining its opposition to neoimperial imperatives today. Instead of purely textual idealism, that has dominated the colonial discourse theory under the influence of poststructuralist and postmodernist insistence on difference, I argue that anticolonial critique would do better if it brings the hard materiality of history, politics and economics back to bear upon the analysis of cultural forms. However, I would like to mention that this thesis has not dealt in detail the diverse debates around the politics of representation and the processes of othering. This is one of the limitations of this thesis. The framework which I have tried to develop here can be further developed if it is applied to other cultural forms like films and cinema, especially films made by Hollywood during and after the Iranian Revolution. Increasingly large numbers of films have resorted to Orientalist clichés to present Muslims as villains and terrorists in movies. The framework of this thesis can be used to better understand the relationship between those movies and the US imperial policies and actions.