Chapter VI
Books on Islam

Naipaul expresses his views on Islam without any prejudice. His position as an outsider helps him to observe the things freely. He has no attachment to any country and its citizens. He forms his views purely on his observations. Though he is an outsider, he is capable to feel what others feel on a certain issue. He laughs with them and sighs with them. He has a critical outlook and feels himself free from the guilt of a European sentimentality. In *Among the believers*, Naipaul presents his observations on Islam, Islamic states and Muslims while he visits Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia in 1979. *Beyond Belief* is a follow up on *Among the Believers*. In this book, he describes his visits to the same countries after sixteen years, the publication of *Among the Believers* establishes Naipaul’s reputation as an intrepid and honest chronicler of the Third World. It shows his ability to provide a comprehensive assessment of a major phenomenon: Islam. He has dealt with the theme of conversion also. His first book is an exploration of the details of the faith and what looked like its capacity for revolution.

His travel-books are a mixture of prose and fiction. His travel-books are filled with individuals, characters descriptions sketched-in landscapes, voices, opinions, life-stories and his judgment of the people he meets. He visits a place without a pre-arranged programme. He meets people personally and as a writer. He often depends on a translator. He goes where news is or where local people tell him and sometimes he takes surprise in a person he meets and interviews him. Naipaul engages
with a wide variety of situations and people. He has his opinions and prejudices, but he listens to those he meets, and notes how they appear and what they say. He illustrates how people make or unmake themselves in a changing world. These people become characters in Naipaul’s narrative. Sometimes Naipaul disagrees with them, but he has an interest in them. It occurs because of a clash in personalities. In Naipaul’s travel-book, there is constant engagement between the author and his characters. In his later visit, he sees progress in the situation as compared to the earlier visit. He changes his opinion and admits that he was wrong. He meets local writers, reporters, school teachers, clergy or intellectuals who also write.

Generally Naipaul offers an analysis of the societies and problems of the postcolonial world, but in these travel-books, Naipaul’s main concern is the people he meets. He studies their lives in relation to their personality, beliefs and situations. In these books, he discusses the effect of Islam on nations outside the Arab World. In Among the Believers, Naipaul puts a question to those he meets in the four countries - in what way do Muslims expect Islam to facilitate the creation of an ideal and prosperous Islamic state and what role should it play in the economical, technological and political era. While he visits these countries, he tries to meet those persons who are able to reply these questions. He meets persons who are trying to be habitual to an Islamic state. Naipaul reaches Iran just after the overthrow of the Shah and return of Ayatollah Khomeini but before the seizure of the American embassy and the use of its staff as hostages, an event which gave the fundamentalists control of
the Iranian resolution and allowed them to suppress the possibility of a secular democracy.

Naipaul finds that there were two contrasting ideals, which were responsible for the revolutions against Shaw. There was a widespread desire to overthrow a corrupt tyrannical regime. Secularists wanted to get rid of Shaw, but they confused their aims with those religious leaders who wanted to erase the modernizing results of the Shaw’s policies. They wanted to cut away his emphasis on Iran and want to make Iran a competitor with Saudi Arabia for leadership of the Muslim world. During his visit, Naipaul learns that Iran and Saudi Arabia represent two opposing branches of Islam, which link their histories to events, which occurred soon after the death of Mohammed. Each branch regards the others as a heresy. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia are rich countries. Both attempt to return to a pure Islamic way of life, which existed under the rule of the prophet. It means a rule under clergy, who will be head in political and religious laws, will be implied on all. In early days, Islam was considered a confident, tolerant and worldly religion, but now its image has emerged as intolerant, backward looking. It opposes modernisation violently.

In Iran, Naipaul is dependent on a translator. He plans to visit the holy city Qom by bus. He finds his first translator as sneering, proud and unhappy. In Behzad, Naipaul finds a good translator. He is a Marxist revolutionary university student. He does not like the religious direction
the Iranian revolution is now taking. Behzad appears at the end of book as a worshipper of Stalin:

What he did in Russia we have to do in Iran. We too have to do a lot of killing. A lot... We have to kill all the bourgeoisie. All the oppressor class.¹

Behzad is not against the bourgeois class, but he is against the religious fundamentalists who take Marxism as alien and want to sweep it away. They think that Marxism is making their people astray. Behzad knows that these fundamentalists have no sympathy for those who oppose them. Some of Behzad's friends have been killed and he is in danger. He feels that he has joined the wrong revolution. Like Stalin, he thinks, there can be a proper system if the society is cleansed of the radical fundamentalist.

When Naipaul visits the Muslim countries, he collects his first hand experience. He was born and brought up in Trinidad and Muslims were part of the small Indian community of Trinidad. But he knew little of their religion. To quote Naipaul:

The difference between Hindus and Muslims was more a matter of group feeling, and mysterious: the animosities our Hindu and Muslim grandfathers had brought from India had softened into a kind of folk wisdom about the unreliability and treachery of the other side.

I was without religious faith myself. I barely understood the rituals and ceremonies I grew up with. In Trinidad, with its many races, my Hinduism was really an attachment to my family and its ways, an
attachment to my own difference; and I imagined that among Muslims and others there were similar attachments and privacies.

What I knew about Islam was what everyone on the outside knew. They had a Prophet and a Book; they believed in one God and disliked images; they had an idea of heaven and hell—always a difficult idea for me. They had their own martyrs. Once a year mimic mausolea were wheeled through the streets; man “danced” with heavy crescent moons, swinging the moons now one way, now the other; drums beat, and sometime there were ritual stick fights.²

Naipaul is not used to the language of Iran, so when he visits Iran, he hires an interpreter. His interpreter has socialist leanings and represents those who viewed the revolution in secular terms. Naipaul engages with a wide variety of situations and people. Naipaul is always aware of life that has similarities to his own or his parents. After Iran, Naipaul visited Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia and then returned to Iran. Although they have different histories, Iran early became part of Islam. It has an ancient Persian civilization which was one of the glories of the world and which influenced India. Shah attempted to modernize Persia, for this he tried to renew and utilize this history, while the fundamentalist tried to suppress it.

Indian Muslims formed Pakistan, for they wanted their own country. They felt themselves unsafe in Hindu dominated secular India. Competing regions and ethnicities seriously split Pakistan. The state has failed to produce a functioning secular democracy. It has fallen under
control of the army and the clergy. The state and its people are pre-
disposed towards fundamentalism. Saudi Arab funds school, which teach 
fundamentalism. In Indonesia, Islam was long ago brought by traders and 
replaced Buddhism and Hinduism, but still the Asian religions and many 
local cults lived in along side Islam.

Naipaul claims that Islam denied any history previous to itself. In 
Pakistan’s schoolbooks history begins with the Prophet and the first four 
Caliphs, and then jumps to the creation of Pakistan. The country is ruled 
by the military, but the schoolbooks claim that Pakistan is democracy 
unlike caste-ridden India. To quote Naipaul:

The time before Islam is a time of blackness: that is part of Muslim 
theology. History has to serve theology. The excavated city of Mohenjo-
Daro in the Indus Valley – over run by the Aryans in 1500 B.C. – is one 
of the archeological glories of Pakistan and the world. The excavations 
are now being damaged by water logging and salinity, and appeals for 
money have been made to world organizations. A featured letter in 
Dawn offered its own ideas for the site. Verses from the Koran, the 
writer said should be engraved and setup in Mohenjo-Daro in 
“appropriate places”: “Say (unto them, O Mohammed): Travel in the 
land and see the nature of the sequel for the guilty.”

Naipaul finds that Mohenjo-Daro in the Indus valley is a famous 
arheological site. It was over run by the Aryans in 1500 B.C. Its 
destruction can be prevented by international aid, but in a Pakistani 
publication it was suggested that the site should be engraved with verses
from the Koran, which claims the purpose of travel, is to see the consequences of guilty idolatry. Thus, the local history is replaced by Arab theology; people feel strangers to their own land and lose their sense of identity. To quote Naipaul:

The Chachnama shows the Arabs of the seventh century as a people stimulated and enlightened and disciplined by Islam, developing fast, picking up learning and new ways and new weapons (catapults, Greek fire) from the people they conquer, intelligently curious about the people they intend to conquer. The current fundamentalist wish in Pakistan to go back to that pure Islamic time has nothing to do with a historical understanding of the Arab expansion. The fundamentalists feel that to be like those early Arabs they need only one tool: the Koran. Islam, which made the seventh-century Arabs world conquerors, now clouds the minds of their successors or pretended successors.

It was the poet Iqbal’s hope that an Indian Muslim state might rid Islam of “the stamp that Arab imperialism was forced to give it.” It turns out now that the Arabs were the most successful imperialists of all time, since to be conquered by them (and then to be like them) is still, in the minds of the faithful, to be saved.  

In Muslim countries Naipaul meets people and notes that there is a widespread notion that society was just under Mohammed and if people are believers and follow the Koran, they will live just lives. If the society follows such ways, justice will return. The base of Islamic law consists of what the Prophet said or did or what can be deduced from Koran. But
Naipaul is not agreed with this. If Islamic history is examined critically, there was never such a time when there were no problems and perfect justice. And after the Prophet's death, the condition became even worse as others claimed the right to rule. There was resentment, anger and revolutionary spirit latent within Islam. Naipaul interviews a number of persons and finds that unlike Christianity, Islam says do not turn the other cheek, do not accept insults and injustice, but strike those who insult or harm or fail to believe. Naipaul finds that although, they are attached to their religion, yet they want to be benefited by the western notions of socialist utopianism. Many of Muslim intellectuals mix fundamentalism with western slogans of returning to an original innocence and closeness to nature.

Naipaul suggests that Islam is a dogmatic set of rules, which were created to be consonant with the spiritual, social and imperial aspirations of the Medieval Arabia of and after the Prophet. Islamic dogma originates from the authority of the Prophet, and through him, the Koran and from the authority of Islamic leaders. The basis of Islam is not social and political effectiveness but absolute faith in the dogma and its authorities. Islam is indifferent to the changes of history. Islamic dogmas are of regressive nature.

Though Islamic dogma and authorities refused to accept change, they are dependent on the western world. Muslim intellectuals accept the technological and scientific practical knowledge and imports of the West. They utilize these resources to promote Islam in the modern world. Thus
Naipaul finds that Islamic countries have no concrete and realizable state. Islamic dogmas are unbending in form yet ready to accept what can be got from non-Islamic countries. Naipaul gets in touch with Khalid Ishaq, one of the leading lawyers of Karachi. He was a member of the Islamic ideology council that met for ten days a month in the capital. To quote his explanation of his Islamic passion:

Our people emotionally reject the West. Materially, we may be dependent on the West. Our people may go abroad to better themselves. But however long they stay, they always want to come back, if only to die. And it was out of that emotional rejection of the outside world that Khalid Ishaq conceived the need for specifically Islamic institutions - institutions not of the West, and not socialist, but institutions in keeping with the people’s emotional needs.

To understand those needs, it was necessary to understand the idea of equality in Islam. The servant here brings us tea and sweets. That is his job. But he also knows that on another occasion we can be men together and he can sit with me. And there was the role of the mosque: every Friday everyman, whatever his condition, heard from the mullahs that the laws of men were not to be obeyed if they went against the teachings of the Koran.

So the Islamic enterprise was stupendous: it was the deliberate creation - with only the Koran as a guide - of a state mechanism that would function in the modern world and would be unlike anything else that had evolved. It was a high intellectual enterprise.⁵
Naipaul suggests that the unbending form of Islamic faith surrounds individuals. They are determined by Islam and are forbidden to think in a creative or progressive way. Naipaul realizes that rage, anxiety and dissatisfaction all are result of these restrictions. Thus Islamic faith and dogma are designed to weaken the spiritual needs and growth of its practitioners, whether they realize or not. To quote Naipaul:

The Islam that was coming to the village — brushed with new and borrowed ideas about the wickedness of the machine, the misuse of foreign aid — was the Islam that in the late twentieth century had rediscovered its political roots. The Prophet had founded a state. He had given men the idea of equality and union. The dynastic quarrels that had come early to this state had entered he theology of the religion, which filled men’s days with rituals and ceremonies of worship, which preached the afterlife, at the same time gave men the sharpest sense of worldly injustice and made that part of religion.

This late-twentieth century Islam appeared to raise political issues. But it had the flaw of its origins — the flaw that ran right through Islamic history: to the political issues it raised it offered no political or practical solution. It offered only the faith. It offered only the Prophet, who would settle everything — but who had ceased to exist. This political Islam was rage, anarchy.  

It can be assumed that the intellectuals who promote Islamic dogma are not creative. They do not have any clear and practical insight. They wanted to impose these rules on people. Naipaul thinks what logic
works behind the custom of wearing the veils that some Malay village women wear in Kuala Lumpur. Naipaul notes that though there are developments in architecture, new residential building, the Koran-built highways, but there is no reformation in their outlook. They are still attached to their old faith. To quote Naipaul:

In public gardens and in other places in this new town can be seen young village Malays dressed as Arabs, with turbans and gowns. The Arab dress – so far from Pakistan, so far from Arabia – is their political badge. In the university there are girls who do not only wear the veil, but in the heat also wear gloves and socks. Different groups wear different colours. The veil is more than the veil; it is a mask of aggression. Not like the matted locks of the Ras Tafarian in Jamaica, a man dulled by a marginal life that has endured for generations; not like the gear of the middle-class hippie, who wishes only to drop out; these are the clothes of uprooted village people who wish to pull down what is not theirs and then take over. Because an unacknowledged part of the fantasy is that the world goes on, runs it, has only to be inherited.⁷

Naipaul is often impressed by the force of Islamic force, its impact on individuals and its capacity to affect their aspirations and motivate their life in the direction it wants. He finds individual Muslims who have adherence to Islamic ideals or those who are responsible for any Islamic organizations, as trapped by their religion.

Finally through this travel book, Naipaul gives a detailed description of ideals and faith, which work in these countries. He finds
that there is influence of revolutionary socialist idealism on the minds of people, and they have deep regard for their dogmatic Islamic ideals. Naipaul finds that Behzad and his girl friend have revolutionary fervour, which is not bound by rules, and imaginary as the Islamic revolution and movements which have overtaken them. Naipaul notes that socialist revolutionary sentiments in Islamic contexts lack a rational basis. It is difficult to differentiate a socialist revolution and an Islamic revolution. There is no difference in their form and the scale of social violence. He finds this similarity of socialist revolution and Islamic revolution in the development of Indonesian politics. He notices this in Sukarno’s socialist idealism, Suharto’s gradual acquiring of Islamic faith and Habibie’s technocratic Islamic vision. To quote Naipaul:

To replace all this. Islam sanctified rage – rage about the faith, political rage: one could be like the other. And more than once on this journey I had met sensitive men who were ready to contemplate great convulsions.

In Iran there had been Behzad, who had shown me Tehran and the holy cities of Qom and Mashad. He was the communist son of a communist father and not a Muslim. But his communism was like a version of the Shia rage about injustice; a rage rooted in the overthrow by the Arabs of the Old Persian Empire in the seventh century. Good Muslims believed that the best time in the world was the time of the Prophet and the best time was in Russia between 1917 and 1953. Darkness had been dispelled; an unjust society had been overthrown; and the jails and
camps of Russia were full of the wicked. For Behzad the idea of justice was inseparable from the idea of punishment. Ayatollah Khomeini spoke in the name of God the avenger; Behzad, the communist, spoke like Khomeini.³

At last, Naipaul is so disappointed that he desires to leave the Islamic countries. During his journey, he comes to know that American embassy has been seized in Iran, the elections in Pakistan were cancelled, people tried to start a revolt followed by a gun battle at the Great Mosque in Mecca, Russia has invaded Afghanistan. Naipaul meets a number of people and finds that due to these political and religious movements, the career of many of these persons have been ruined. Naipaul had met Nushrat who was a hard-working journalist. He wanted to reject the modern civilization but wanted to study in the United States. He published an Arabian article about a great granddaughter of the Prophet. This article outraged the Shias and the government had to close down this newspaper. Now this newspaper is allowed to publish again but Nushrat, and his family is in danger. On returning to Tehran, Naipaul looks for Mr. Jaffrey, a Shia from India. He was of the opinion that social and political injustices could be cured by an Islamic revival. Naipaul wonders how political problems can be solved through religion, and how faith can bring about fair wages and the rule of law. Mr. Jaffrey could not find the justice and lost his job. Thus Among the Believers stands as a sort of personal interlude in Naipaul’s career of discovering the world.
Beyond Belief describes Naipaul's visit to the same four countries again sixteen years later. This travel book also repeats the same observations. After sixteen years he finds that his observations about the Islamic polity and its subjects were true. He observes the regressive nature of Islamic dogmas in all the countries he visits. In Among the Believers, Naipaul concludes that Islamic dogma and faith have no concrete and realizable state. It attempts to dominate cultures that are not Islamic and wants to convert people. Beyond Belief illustrates how non-Arab Muslims had been and are being arabized under the guise of Islamization. Naipaul finds in this process the seeds of a terrible cultural and spiritual colonization. This process is not determined to improve the lives of their people but it is destroying the cultures of the past and the person who change their religion, do not feel at home with new religion and they have to forget their own culture. When Christianity happened long ago in Europe, the local religion disappeared and Christianity tried to uproot the original culture of people. In Indonesia, Malaysia and non-Arab areas of the Islamic world, fundamentalist intellectuals are trying to uproot everything, which does not confirm the Koran.

For Naipaul has interest in history and regard for historically famous places, so in Beyond Belief, he shows great reverence for such places associated with older religions or cults. He asserts that Islamic expansion outside Arabia is the most debilitating form of imperialism. To quote Naipaul:
Islam is in its origin an Arab religion. Everyman not an Arab who is a Muslim is a convert. Islam is not simply a matter of conscience or private belief. It makes imperial demands. A convert’s worldview alters. His holy places are in Arab lands; his sacred language is Arabic. His idea of history alters. He rejects his own; he becomes, whether he likes or not, a part of the Arab story. The convert has to turn away from everything that is his. The disturbance for societies is immense, and even after a thousand years can remain unresolved; the turning away has to be done again and again. People develop fantasies about who and what they are; and in the Islam of converted countries there is an element of neurosis and nihilism. These countries can be easily set on the boil.⁹

After visiting Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan and Iran, Naipaul comes to the point that Islam is an Arab religion. Everyone who is not an Arab has become a Muslim. This religion is not just faith or belief, but it wants a total conversion and uprooting of the original culture of the people. Thus it plays the role of a terrible cultural and spiritual colonizer. Every country has ancient beliefs and cults, but Islamization demands to uproot all these beliefs. This creates a feeling to reject all religious and moral principles because the converted people are often confused about their identity. These people easily get involved in riots and movements for they are fully satisfied with the new religion. Through his perspective on Islam, Naipaul examines the colonizer-colonized cultural relationship.
Naipaul has analyzed the phenomenon of Islamic expansion in terms of his mimicked-mimic counterpoint just as he has done in his early writings on the Caribbean and on India. Naipaul compares Islamic imperialism and the West imperialism and finds Islamic imperialism as regressive and medieval whereas the West imperialism as liberal and positive. In his writings on the Caribbean and on India, he observes that during colonial period, though countrymen suffered a lot, yet they had benefited from the West technology. There was change in people’s outlook. Naipaul describes the Islamic revival within a longer history of Indonesia. To quote Naipaul:

Islam and Europe had arrived here almost at the same time as competing imperialisms, and between them they had destroyed the long Buddhist-Hindu past. Islam had moved on here, to this part of Greater India, after its devastation of India proper, turning the religious-cultural light of the subcontinent, so far as this region was concerned, into the light of a dead star. Yet Europe had dominated so quickly here that Islam itself had begun to feel like a colonized culture. The family history that a cultivated and self-aware man like Mr. Wahid carried in his head - a history that true family memory took back only a century and a quarter - was at the same time a history of European colonialism and of the recovery of Islam.10

Naipaul observes that Islam and European culture arrived Indonesia at the same time. Islam tried to destroy the Buddhist-Hindu past. It tried to uproot the local culture. He notes that the effect of
European culture was so great that Islam itself started to realize like a foreign culture. Naipaul favours Western imperialism because it gave opportunity for intellectual development and supported the growth of history. On the other hand Islamic imperialism only weakened intellectual growth and tried to uproot the local culture. Naipaul realizes this when he compares his experiences of India and Pakistan. To quote:

The British period – two hundred years in some places, less than a hundred in others – was a time of Hindu regeneration. The Hindus, especially in Bengal, welcomed the New Learning of Europe and the institutions the British brought. The Muslims wounded by their loss of power, and out of old religious scruples, stood aside. It was the beginning of the intellectual distance between the two communities. This distance has grown with independence; and it is this – more even than religion now – that at the end of the twentieth century has made India and Pakistan quite distinct countries. India with an intelligentsia that grows by leaps and bounds expands in all directions. Pakistan, proclaiming only the faith and then proclaiming the faith again, ever shrinks.\textsuperscript{11}

Naipaul notes that today India and Pakistan are at two different poles. In India, there is development in every field. In science and technology, India has progressed a lot, while Pakistan is attached to its religion only. It has provided no opportunity for intellectual development. Islam is seen as regressive. While British ruled on India, Muslims remained isolated from British Education. As a result, Muslims could not
develop modern outlook and even today they are looked on as backward. So it may be said that while Western imperialism has benefited our country, Islamic imperialism has contributed nothing. It only tried to destroy history and local culture.

When Islamic imperialism invaded a country, it tried to abolish local culture and compelled people to accept the new religion, new pilgrimages and new language. It tried to change people completely. Islamic phenomenon suppressed their local heritage, their sacred places and their sacred languages. The local people felt that there would be intellectual revival. In Beyond Belief, Naipaul has presented authentic and cultural manifestations. To quote Naipaul:

Perhaps it is this absence of the sense of sacredness – which is more than the idea of the ‘environment’ – that is the curse of the New World, and is the curse especially of Argentina and ravaged places like Brazil. And perhaps it is this sense of sacredness – rather than history and the past – that we of the New World travel to the Old to rediscover.

So it is strange to someone of my background that in the converted Muslim countries – Iran, Pakistan, and Indonesia – the fundamentalist rage is against the past, against history, and the impossible dream is of the true faith growing out of a spiritual vacancy.¹²

Thus Naipaul analyses Islamic expansion as a damaging imperial phenomenon and the requirement of cultural essentialism. There is cultural loss because of Islam expansion. In Beyond Belief, Naipaul revisits places he had visited before and met the people he had met
earlier. First of all, he goes to Indonesia and finds that Indonesia has made progress in these sixteen years. He meets Mr. Imaduddin who is an electrical engineer and gives a course in Islamic 'mental training' at the Bandung Institute of Technology in Java. He tried to train people mentally so that they may replace the present society. He taught them the importance of the Islamic community. They were instructed that everything outside Islamic community is unimportant. He thinks that everything good about socialism can be found in the Koran. Imaduddin becomes an important government person in the interim. He is very close to Habibie. Imaduddin is seen as the pioneer of the Islamic revival and the Association of Muslim Intellectuals. Naipaul realizes that all attempts of Imaduddin may be seen as hazardous to the essential pre-Islamic cultural forms. To quote Naipaul:

In Indonesia we were almost at the limit of the Islamic world. For a thousand years or so until 1400 this had been a cultural and religious part of Greater India: animist, Buddhist, Hindu, Islam had come here not long before Europe. It had not been the towering force it had been in other converted places. For the last two hundred years, in a colonial world, Islam had been on defensive, the religion of a subject people. It had not completely possessed the souls of people. It was still a missionary religion. It had been kept alive informally in colonial times, in simple village boarding schools, descended perhaps as an idea from Buddhist Monasteries.
To posses or control these schools was to possess power. And I began to feel that Imaduddin and the Association of Muslim Intellectuals – with their stress on science and technology, and their dismissing of old ritual ways – aimed at nothing less. The ambition was stupendous: to complete the Islamic take-over of this part of world, and to take the islands to their destiny as the leader of Islamic revival in the twenty-first century.13

When Naipaul asked Imaduddin what the modern questions were that the Koran could solve. Imaduddin replied that the Koran could improve human relations. The basic mission of the Prophet Mohammed was to create a sense of equality and freedom from want and fear. He says that Muslims in Indonesia realize that they are backward because the Spanish, the British, and the Dutch colonized them. In Indonesia there is a mix culture of animist, Buddhist and Hindu. Islam was here a missionary religion and it was taught in simple village boarding schools. This idea was taken from Buddhist monasteries. Imaduddin stressed on science and technology and dismissal of old ritual ways. Behind this ambition of Imaduddin and the Association of Muslim Intellectuals was to complete the Islamic take-over of Indonesia and to make Indonesia as the leader of Islamic revival in the twenty-first century.

Naipaul takes Imaduddin as a person who depends on the West as well as rejects it. He passes three years in the United States to study for an advanced degree. He imitates Western models of the mind-training exercise and teaches middle-class urban Indonesians that all they need is
Islamic united state. Imaduddin was a versatile genius. He had fought against the Dutch in the war of independence. He was sent to Muslim student organizations abroad, where he inspired them to be fundamentalist. Though his involvement with Muslim radicalism resulted in his fourteen months imprisonment in Indonesia, now he is internationally famous. Now he is residing in Jakarta, the national capital. President Suharto favours him because he thinks that Islam is the glue that is needed to keep Indonesia together, this is the only issue, which can keep him in power. By his mental-training course, Imaduddin has created a class of educated Muslim. He is very near to Habibie who is a devout Muslim and powerful minister for research and technology. Habibie thinks that the manufacturing own airplanes can be the start of a national industrial revolution. Imaduddin also became the head of a Foundation for Development and Management of Human Resources. He instructs intellectuals and scientist that they should be pious Muslims so that Indonesia may become an integral part of the Muslim world during the twenty-first century.

Through Imaduddin, Naipaul illustrates his main themes – Muslims depend on modern world which Islam criticizes, schools are sponsored by Arab oil money and it has its effect on the Islamic revival. Naipaul observes that through Islamization, intellectual Muslims try to destruct the non-Arab past completely. In Indonesia, Naipaul meets Mr. Wahid. He is just opposite of Imaduddin. He thinks that Islam is a moral force and it should be kept separate from politics. He represents a calm and tolerant tradition within Islam. When Naipaul meets him first, he does not
like Wahid, for he thinks that what skills are taught in Wahid’s school can be learnt without the school and in such a country religious education consists of memorizing the Koran.

In *Among the Believers*, Naipaul is unsympathetic towards Wahid, he thinks that Wahid’s school is made famous by Ivan Illich’s praise. When he meets him after sixteen years, Naipaul finds Wahid powerful enough to oppose the government represented by Habibie and Imaduddin. They are trying to Islamize politics and the nation. Wahid represents a religious boarding school movement. It has a long history starting with Buddhist monks and later the Islamic Sufis during a time when Indonesia was only half-converted. Wahid’s father was a leader in the fight against the Dutch. He was made minister of Religious Affairs, but he resigned from the cabinet to form his own party. In 1984, Wahid inherited the leadership of the party from his father. Wahid wanted to keep it out of politics because mixing Islam with politics cannot enforce religion. It has resulted in violence in Pakistan, Sudan, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Wahid and his family did not like this form of Islam.

In Malaysia, Naipaul meets with Syed Alwi, who is a writer. Naipaul finds similarities in his life and the life of Syed Alwi. Syed Alwi remembers that in Malaysia everyone felt that great minds used to be cracked when they were over-extended. His father was quite brilliant when he was young. He was considered as a great mind. In 1921, when his father was twenty-one, he became a magistrate. His position in the world was secure but still he was turning away from it. He was fascinated
by philosophy, religion and the nature of God. None in the family knew about turbulence in his mind. He did not like communication in English and he decided not to live in the colonial style. He felt quite alone and in 1922, when he was twenty-two, he broke down mentally. He was terminated from the civil service for he was medically unfit. He lived two lives, one in this material world and the other in his private world. In 1953, Syed Alwi met his father’s friend who told Alwi about his father’s past that his father faced a spiritual horror. He did not like to accept the Islamic God. He wanted to know God more intimately. He read the books of other religions in his search for God. Syed Alwi’s father survived when he was thought as insane. His mother was a decent lady. Her life was full of pain and suffering and her behaviour towards her husband was very tender. To quote Naipaul:

Syed Alwi said of his mother, once the thirteen-year old bride of the seventeen-year old settlement officer, ‘She was the community. From her Malay upbringing, she provided him with the support that enabled him to have his two worlds. Without her he would have been thrown into the madhouse’ — the place of water-hoses and rice mixed with sand — ‘and he wouldn’t have lasted two years. As it was, he lived in his two worlds for twenty-three years.’

Naipaul meets many people, who are lonely and tell him about the sad lives of their mother divorced by their father. Naipaul observes that the easiness of divorce in the Islamic world has resulted in men wounded by the lack of a father. Thus Beyond Belief represents a wide range of
Naipaul's interests, along with the politics of religion. Naipaul has worked on the notion of authentic cultures also. The authentic culture consists of converted people's holy pilgrimages and their sacred languages. A person is proud of his cultural heritage, but this is suppressed by the Islamic phenomenon and people expect that they will revitalize their cultural heritage in some period of intellectual regeneration. Naipaul thinks that the same was the case with the Hindus when they realize this revival in the liberal British period. Naipaul has sympathy for pre-Islamic cultural manifestations. For he is of the opinion that the absence of the sense of sacredness is a curse for the New World.

Naipaul notes that he also felt this lack of the sense of sacredness in Trinidad. He passed eighteen years on an island that had no sacred places. It resulted in incompleteness and emptiness and created a sense that the real world existed somewhere else. He remembers that in Trinidad, Indians used to feel – that they were immigrant people and their past ended with their parents. To quote Naipaul:

My first eighteen years were spent two oceans away, on the other side of the globe, in the New World, on an island in the mouth of one of the great south American rivers. The island had no sacred places; and it was nearly forty years after I had left the island that I identified the lack.

I began to feel when I was quite young that there was an incompleteness, an emptiness, about the place, and that the real world existed somewhere else... This feeling might have had to do with the
smallness of the island, which we all used to say was only a dot on the map of the world.¹⁵

Naipaul thinks that this absence of the sense of sacredness is a curse for Argentina and Brazil. Because of this sense, people visit the old places of importance. So when Naipaul visits Iran, Pakistan and Indonesia, he realizes his anger against history and the impossible dream that the true faith can be developed out of a spiritual emptiness.

He supports the animistic pre-Islamic sentiments of the Indonesian Dewi Fortuna Anwar. This is illustrated when Naipaul visits Pasargadae’s pre-Islamic Zoroastrian temple and Cyrus’s palace in Iran. This can be seen in his explanation of the life of the bomoh in Malaysia. In Indonesia and Malaysia, Islam is still growing and ambitious and there is prosperity, but the picture changes when he visits the heartland of the converted Islamic world. When after sixteen years he visits Pakistan and Iran, Naipaul notes that these countries have been destroyed by war, which is the result of regressive Islamic dogma. In these countries, there are violence and bitterness; people are spiritually dissatisfied. Naipaul focuses on these issues to illustrate his doubts about the Islamic polity and its failure. In the prologue, Naipaul explains:

'This book is a follow-up to a book I published seventeen years ago, Among the Believers, about a journey to the same four countries. When I started on that journey in 1979 I knew almost nothing about Islam – it is the best way to start on a venture – and that first book was an exploration of the details of the faith and what looked like its capacity
for revolution. The theme of conversion was always there; but I didn’t see it as I saw it on this second journey.

Beyond Belief adds to the earlier 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 to his instinct, a discoverer of people, a finder-out of stories. These stories, opening out one from the other, make their own pattern and define each country and its promptings; and the four sections of the book make a whole.”

Naipaul uses these stories as evidence against Islam. These stories illustrate his concept of Islam as a regressive imperialist phenomenon and cultural essentialism. These stories have helped him in investigating societies. Thus Naipaul’s two books about Islam provide a collection of stories about the non-Arab Islamic world. He reflects the spiritual needs of the people. In Among the Believers, he is ignorant of Islamic culture; he is not familiar with their language and depends on interpreters. He notes what he observes. From these observations, he concludes that in modern world, proponents of Islam are politically aspirants and they believe in its dogmatic and authoritarian form.

In Beyond Belief, he confirms these observations after sixteen years and finds them true. He wants that people in modern world should try to understand what is actually happening in societies beyond such generalizations as globalization, postcolonial and culture clash. He illustrates what is happening in societies beyond such classifications as Third World or Islam. He notes that there are two streams of believers.
The first stream of believers sees Islam as a moral force and the other stream use violence to transform secular to religious notions. He notes Arab expansion stimulated by oil wealth, the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia and their two doctrines of Islam. In these countries, Naipaul finds a class, which insists on arabization of the Islamic world and want to open Islamic fundamentalist schools.

Finally it can be said that there may be doubts about Naipaul's approach and analysis of Islam. He has described the situation as he has observed. Thus his description is based on his observation. He has narrated a number of stories. It can be argued that stories may fail to give general insights into the theology, history, politics and sociology of Islam, which he tries to represent. Naipaul has tried to understand Islam in accordance with his own pre-assumed conservative and anti-revolutionary ideology. Naipaul has observed no distinction between socialist and Islamic revolutions. It may be concluded that he has presented superficial understanding of spiritual needs, heritage and notion of cultural essentialism. He has presented political implications working in Islam. His views on political implications may be observed elaborately in his writings on India.
Notes

2. Ibid, p.11.
5. Ibid, p.117.
10. Ibid, p.31.
15. Ibid, p. 58.
16. Ibid, p.2