CHAPTER I
Introduction
V. S. Naipaul’s Times

The thesis entitled “The study of colonial aspect in the fictional works V.S. Naipaul” is an attempt to understand how, where and why, Naipaul has expressed his views on colonialism. Naipaul is a prolific writer who has written several fiction and non-fiction. Naipaul continues to live in Britain and has over the past forty years written several travelogues and many novels. During forty years of travel, Naipaul has created a wide range of work. Each work is something exceptional and presents certain aspect of our world. Naipaul has modern outlook but he is much concerned with past. Naipaul has examined a number of societies and people and expressed his views on these matters through his experience.

Naipaul’s ancestors migrated from India three generations previously on his mother’s side and four on his father’s. His father’s family came from Ayodhya, in Uttar Pradesh. At that time, Trinidad was a crown colony, it acquired its independence in 1962. Trinidad’s Indians represented a large minority community. They were imported as indentured labourer, between the years 1845 and 1917. They were imported to work on the sugar plantations. for they were considered cheap and easily controlled labour. Before this, African slaves were imported to work on sugar plantations, but after the abolition of slavery in the 1930s, labourers came from India. His grandfather worked on a sugarcane plantation.
His father Seepersad Naipaul, was one of the first Asian Indians in Trinidad to write about their community. He published a small book of short stories in 1943 and influenced his son’s decision to become a writer. Seepersad Naipaul married into the Capildeo family, an important Hindu family on the island. He had to depend on the patronage of wealthy family members among his own and his wife’s families. Naipaul writes that his father: “dangled all his life in a half-dependence and half-esteeem between these two powerful families.”

Seepersad hanged loosely between his family and his wife’s family. He had no existence of his own self. He wanted to escape and have his own house and at last he succeeded in buying it. Seepersad was a journalist and wrote articles to the Trinidad Guardian. Later he was made staff correspondent in Chaguanas, the town in central Trinidad. V.S. Naipaul writes:

It was through his journalism on MacGowan’s Guardian that my father arrived at that vision of the countryside and its people which he later transferred to his stories.

While Seepersad worked for Trinidad Guardian, he wrote about eccentric characters, murders, village feuds, family quarrel and bitter election battles. There was a bond of mischievous humour between Seepersad and his editor, Gault MacGowan. His mind was replete with custom and he reflected these customs in his stories.

In 1932, Naipaul was born in a small town in Trinidad into a family of Indian Brahmin origin. He was preceded by an elder sister,
Kamla and was to have four younger sisters and a younger brother, Shiva. The family lived in the house of his mother’s family, the Lion House in Chaguanas, where his father passed his life as a vague and shadowy figure. His mother’s side of the family was orthodox Hindus and included landowners and pundits and was among the leading Indian families of the island. Seepersad was critical and had modern outlook. Due to his reformist principles and as a consequence of his reporting activities, his relations with the Capildeo family were not satisfactory.

The relations between his parents were not satisfactory and Seepersad often lived separate from his wife. Naipaul’s early years were that of an almost fatherless child in a large extended family. In 1938, his family shifted from Chaguanas to Port of Spain. The family had no house of their own, lived among relatives until 1947 when they got their own house. The constant shifting from house to house with his sisters and brother generated a sense of aloofness in Naipaul. This dependence on his relatives compelled him to think how anyone can bring children into this cruel world.

Naipaul’s formal schooling was in an educational system whose program was settled in nineteenth-century British India. The educational system had the influence of Macaulay’s much quoted “Minute on Indian Education”, in which he declares that the purpose of colonial education was to:
form a class who may be interpreters between [the British] and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect.³

Macaulay wanted to prescribe such education, which might help to form a class of interpreters who might be a link between his officers and the ruling person so that he might successfully run his administration in the colonial country. Although the educational system had gone through several regional and historical modifications, yet the curriculum had yet to make some changes towards the newer demands of an impending era of decolonization. So when he was awarded the scholarship to Oxford in 1948 and when he reached London to read English, he was in a position to await and oversee. There were such options of migration or return emerging for colonials in a post-colonial and post-independence era.

During Naipaul’s youth, opportunities for education beyond primary schooling were scarce in Trinidad. The only good secondary schools were in Port of Spain. They were expensive and there were only a few scholarships through a national competitive examination. In 1938, the family moved to Port of Spain, to another house belonging to his mother’s family. In 1942, Naipaul won a scholarship to Queen’s Royal College in Port of Spain, where he studied French and Spanish and played cricket. There were four scholarships to foreign universities that could be gained through a national examination.

In 1949, after having some pictures of himself taken for his application to the University, Naipaul wrote to his elder sister:
I never knew my face was fat. The picture said so. I looked at the Asiatic on the paper and thought that an Indian from India could look no more than I did. I had hoped to send up a striking pose to the university people but look what they have got.  

Naipaul was struck to see his own photograph, he had estimated his features high, but he was disappointed to see these snaps. After a nervous breakdown he tried to commit suicide, but luckily the gas meter ran out. In the autobiographical Reading and Writing, he says that his success in the examination resulted from cramming, mindlessly grinding away at material he never understood as it was foreign to the circumstances in which he lived. Until he left Trinidad, he lived mostly within the psychological confines of his family and the enclosed word of the Hindu community. After graduation he worked for periods as a teacher at the college and as a temporary clerk in the Registrar-General’s Department. He went to Oxford University in 1950 and received B.A Honours in English in 1953.

While studying at Oxford University, he was lonely, isolated, unused to life outside of his extended family. The result of his isolation was that he fell into a deep depression. His father’s financial position was not good, so Vidia had to live with his thin coat in which he used to freeze and his old shoes to leak in the rain. He never had money to repair his typewriter, but he boasted of having tea every day at the most expensive hotel in Oxford. These peculiarities of his behaviour were inherited from his father who was always in debt, yet he was fond of
reading expensive novels from England. Naipaul was a good bowler at cricket, and during his university vacations, used to do physical labour on farms. When Naipaul was at Oxford, his father was himself having short stories read on the BBC Caribbean Voices Programme and often considered that if he had not a family to support, he would have become a writer, which was his main ambition in life. While at Oxford, V.S. Naipaul met Patricia Hale; they married in 1955.

His university days are the subject of Between Father and Son: Family Letters (2000), edited by Gillon Aitken. The letters are mostly between V.S. Naipaul, his elder sister Kamla, and their father Seepersad Naipaul. The mother seldom writes and shares their interests in writing.

His father suffered for a period from mental problems, which caused him to live by himself. He died of a heart attack in 1953 without witnessing the success of his son as writer. He had encouraged Naipaul in his writing aspirations telling him in a letter:

Don't be scared of being an artist. D.H. Lawrence was an artist through and through: and for the time being at any rate, you should think as Lawrence. Remember what he used to say, 'Art for my sake.'

Seepersad Naipaul advised Naipaul to be bold and to pursue his ambition. He asked him not to worry about others who condemn or appreciate an artist's work. One should mould art according to one's needs and desires and should pay less attention to others, for creative art knows no boundaries. When Seepersad had a stroke and died, his sister, Kamla, a brilliant scholarship student, was at Benaras Hindu
University in India, taking courses in Indian Culture. She returned home to support the family, while Naipaul declared that he had married to an English lady and that his first novel had been accepted for publication.

After leaving Oxford, Naipaul lived in a relative’s dark basement room in Paddington, worked for a short period during 1954 in the National Portrait Gallery in London. He started his career as a freelance writer. During this period, Naipaul felt himself rootless, but found his voice as writer in the mid-1950s when he started to examine his own Trinidadian background. From 1954 to 1956, Naipaul was a broadcaster for the BBC’s ‘Caribbean voices,’ which broadcasted the new West Indian writing to the region.

Between the years 1957 and 1961, he was a regular fiction reviewer for the New Statesman. Naipaul published his first book in the late 1950s, but they did not make much money for him or his publisher, Andre Deutsch Limited. However, he knew his value as a writer and refused to write a review for The Times Literary Supplement for their usual fee.

From then, he continued to live in England (since the 70s in Wiltshire, close to stone henge), but he has also spent a great deal of time travelling in Asia, Africa and America. Apart from a few years in the middle of the 1950s, when the BBC employed him as a freelance journalist, he has devoted himself entirely to his writing.

Naipaul’s works consist mainly of novels and short stories, but also include some documentary work. He is, to a very high degree, a
cosmopolitan writer, a fact that he himself considers to stem from his lack of roots; he is unhappy about the cultural and spiritual poverty of Trinidad, he feels alienated from India, and in England he is incapable of relating to and identifying with the traditional values of what was once a colonial power. The events in his earliest books take place in the West Indies.

His first book, *Miguel Street* (1959), was a farewell to Port of Spain, Trinidad. The narrator is a boy who grows up, starts to earn his own money and finally goes abroad to study:

I left them all and walked briskly towards the aeroplane, not looking back. Looking only at my shadow before me, a dancing dwarf on the tarmac.⁶

Just like the character in *Miguel Street* (1979), Naipaul also left his family and Trinidad, settled in London and never returned Trinidad. Naipaul was not satisfied with his youth in Trinidad so he decided to leave Trinidad. Marking the end of his apprenticeship, Naipaul notes:

To become a writer, that noble thing, I had thought it necessary to leave.

Actually to write, it was necessary to go back. It was the beginning of self-knowledge.⁷

In Trinidad, there was no place for people like Naipaul. Such societies had an atmosphere, which compelled such people to escape and make his fortune in any other country, so Naipaul left Trinidad and settled in London. *A House for Mr Biswas* was published in 1961. It is often regarded as his masterpiece, which tells the tragic-comic story of
the search for independence and identity of a Brahmin. The Protagonist, Mohun Biswas, was partly modelled after the author’s father. Later, Naipaul returned to his father in *Between Father and Son* (1999), a record of their correspondence in the early 1950s.

In 1961, Naipaul received a grant from the Trinidad government to travel in the Caribbean. His first non-fiction was *The Middle Passage* (1962), in which he described his first revisiting of the West Indies. From the wide period of travels in the 1960s and early 1970s in India, South America, Africa, Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and the USA, Naipaul produced among others, *India: A wounded Civilisation* (1977), and *A Bend in the River* (1979), a pessimistic novel about Africa, proclaiming the corruptibility of mankind.

Since 1950, Naipaul has lived in Britain but travelled extensively. His essays and travel writings are often negative, unsentimental explorations of West Indian society as in *The Middle Passage* (1962):

As soon as the Francisco Bobadilla had touched the quay, ship’s side against rubber bumpers, I began to feel all my old fear of Trinidad. I did not want to stay. I had left the security of the ship and had no assurance that I would ever leave the island again. I had forgotten nothing; the wooden houses, jalousied half-way down, with fretwork along gables and eaves, fashionable before the concrete era; the concrete houses with L-shaped Verandas and projecting front bedrooms, fashionable in the thirties; the two storeyed Syrian houses in paternal concrete blocks— the top floor repeating the lower, fashionable in the
forties. There were more neon lights. Ambition – a moving hand, drink being poured into a glass – was not matched with skill, and the effect was Trinidadian; vigorous, with a slightly flawed modernity..................A good opening line for a novelist or a travel-writer; but The steel bond used to be regarded as high manifestation of West Indian Culture, but it was a sound I detested.8

Naipaul has travelled in many countries but he could not develop his liking for these countries and their culture. He was always at an arm’s length from these West Indian societies, which had no cultural and spiritual heritage to bestow on its inhabitants.

*Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1981) was accused by Muslim readers of narrow and selective vision of Islam. Naipaul searches the source of the new Islam– and the ideological rage. Naipaul’s latest travel books include *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples* (1978), which intimates portraits from his journeys to the non-Arab Islamic countries of Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan and Malaysia. Naipaul tries to understand the fundamentalist fervour that has marked the Western image of the region. He writes:

Islam is in its origin an Arab religion. Everyone 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 world view alters. His holy places are Arab lands; his scared language is Arabic. His idea of history alters. He rejects his own; he becomes, whether he likes it or not, a part of the Arab story. The convert has to turn away from everything that is his.9
In his trip to Islamic countries he has noticed that these countries has developed as great empires and have a system of their own. Even in this modern age, Islamic countries are just like great empires and pass their own rules and regulations and maintain peace and order in these areas. On his first visit to India, since he was awarded the Nobel Prize, Naipaul felt that we were here not to celebrate the antiquity of literature in India, but to celebrate modern writing.


Central themes in Naipaul’s works are damaging effects of colonialism upon the people of the Third World, but he has no faith in the imported ideas of revolutionaries or the ability of the former colonies to avoid mistakes by the Western consumer societies. As a writer, he has been compared to Joseph Conrad because of similar pessimistic portrayal of human nature and the themes of exile and alienation. He once stated: “Barbarism in India is very powerful because it has a religious side.”

In the essay ‘Conrad’s Darkness’ (pub. in *The Return of Eva Peron*, 1980) Naipaul sees his own background as “one of the Conradian dark places of the earth.” In the 1990s, Naipaul concentrated on non-fiction. In 1994, appeared his long-awaited novel *A way in the World*, an autobiography and a fictional history of colonialism, presenting stories from the times of Sir Walter Raleigh to the nineteenth century
revolutionary Francisco Miranda. In *Half a life* (2001), the protagonist is Willie Somerset Chandran, born in India in the 1930s.

Among Naipaul’s several literary awards, there is the Booker Prize for *In a Free State* (1971). He was knighted in 1989 and in 1993; he won the first David Cohen British Literature Prize for “lifetime achievement by a living British writer.” Naipaul’s manuscripts and extensive archives have been deposited in the University of Tulsa. In 2004, his novel *Magic Seeds* was published. On his latest novel, *Magic Seeds*, he said:

In all my writing I’ve been writing to look for ways to organise in a unity the lives I’ve lived. In this book, the life I lived in England comes to the fore. Though I’ve used characters from Half a Life, it does not take off from there and is not a sequel.¹⁰

At a speech in October 2004, Naipaul announced that *Magic Seeds* (2004) may be his last novel. He said:

_magic Seeds may be my last book. I am quite old and books require immense energy. They’re full of ideas and movements. There are multiple narrative lines and thousands of observations in a book. I do not find that energy in myself anymore. Very few people write in their 70s. But the idea that I may not be writing after this gives me a lot of anxiety. All my life, I have been thinking, reading and writing. Life will become pointless when there is no writing.¹¹_

The writing process is very intriguing. When a writer writes a book, it sings in his head and he goes on writing. Then one day, it stops singing and his mind clears and then he moves to the next book. When a writer writes, he focuses completely on it. He remains busy in writing
while doing other activities—while he reads the paper, having tea, all through the day. Then he goes in for a couple of hours to his writing room and actually puts it down on paper. And for a writer, a decision of no more writing will seem quite strange.

This part of presentation attempts to give a brief account of his birthplace, his family conditions, his contemporary social atmosphere and his interest in writing. The fact that the various accounts of his life that he offers, do not propose radically divergent interpretations of his experience and that the views, expressed in the books are more often in harmony than in conflict, ultimately fosters a perception of consistency in relation to his art. He expresses himself more freely on the subject of his life in the interviews than in his non-fiction and fiction. His declarations in interviews show a tendency to dramatise himself in terms of an overstated pessimism but they are broadly consistent with the sense of his life attainable from his writings. His discussion of and writing about his life tend to dwell on his feelings of non-alignment and alienation. He describes himself as having been born into obscurity and poverty. His childhood was characterised by disorders. As a child, he says, he felt that he was in the wrong place and that he was a kind of helpless unit in this large family organisation. Once he received some literary recognition, his life is followed by a succession of travels, revisiting and publications. He explains his travels as a response to the lack of a “settled culture” such as others writers feed on; to having no society to write about.
Formative influence on his mind and art

V.S. Naipaul is generally regarded as the leading novelist of the English-speaking Caribbean. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2001. His writings dealt with the cultural confusion of Third World and the problem of an outsider that was a feature of his own experience as he felt as an Indian in the West Indian, a West Indian in England, and a nomadic intellectual in a post-colonial world.

Naipaul got his inspiration to become a writer from his father, Seepersad Naipaul, who was a journalist on the Trinidad Guardian, the country’s leading newspaper and he himself had published a volume of stories in 1943. This volume showed young Naipaul that Trinidad could be an appropriate subject for literature:

A great deal of my vision of Trinidad has come straight from my father.

Other writers are aware that they are writing about rooted societies; his work showed me that one could write about another kind of society.  

V.S. Naipaul was inspired by his father to become a writer. As an outsider, Seepersad was not satisfied with his life in Trinidad, because it had no cultural past. He remained busy in observing the contemporary atmosphere of Trinidad and exposed in his writing. Thus he showed young V.S. Naipaul that Trinidad could be a suitable subject for writing.

Naipaul’s indebtedness to his father is clearly seen in his early fiction especially in A House for Mr Biswas, which as Landeg White has shown, can be read as a fictionalised biography of Seepersad Naipaul. In his early fiction, Naipaul depended on his father’s stories. Finding the
Centre describes how he himself became a writer. In this novel, he has briefly described his father’s story. His first story was about Bogart who, like Naipaul’s characters, wanted to be free but he was unable to manage it. Naipaul had long wished to be a writer but:

Wish to be a writer didn’t go with a wish or a need actually to write. It went only with the idea I had been given of the writer, a fantasy of nobility. It was something that lay ahead, and outside the life I knew—far from family and clan, city, colony, Trinidad Guardian, Negroes.¹³

Naipaul’s sense of detachment can best be understood in the context of the conditions in which he grew up, as a member of a culturally displaced minority community, and in relation to the nature of colonial education, which encouraged identification with the values of English civilisation and increased his sense of distance from the culture that surrounded him.

After this, Naipaul writes about his father, his ambition, the book he read and his first job at the Trinidad Guardian. He interprets how his family lived, the surroundings from which his son, through his ambition, managed to escape:

Disorder within, disorder without. Only my school life was ordered and that happened there I could date at once. But my family life—my life at home or my life in the house, in the street—was jumbled, without sequence. The sequence I have given it here has come to me only with the writing of this piece. And that is why I am not sure whether it was
before, the upheaval of our move or after our return to Port of Spain that I become aware of my father's writing stories.\textsuperscript{14}

These lines throw light on Naipaul's early life and relation to his father's writing. He was born into obscurity and poverty. His childhood was characterised by disorder. He depicts his existence as beset by anxiety. Naipaul's father only wrote lyrically about Hindu ritual once the family was breaking up and he lived in the city. When V.S. Naipaul was of an age to observe, that culture had begun to weaken; and the time of wholeness had seemed to him as far away as India itself, and almost as dateless.

MacGowan was Seepersad Naipaul's guide and made him perfect. To quote V.S. Naipaul:

The Hindu who wants to be pundit has first to find a guru. My father wanting to learn to write found MacGowan. It was MacGowan. My father said, who had taught him how to write; and all his life my father had for MacGowan the special devotion the Hindu has for his guru.\textsuperscript{15}

In MacGowan, Seepersad found his guide. MacGowan helped Seepersad in writing perfectly. No learning process can be established without a relation between guide and pupil. Both are two sides of a coin. Without one, the other is incomplete, for MacGowan his father was devoted as a Hindu regards his guru. In \textit{The Enigma of Arrival}, Naipaul repeats the same:

I had discovered through the adventure of writing- curiosity and knowledge feeding off one another, committing one not only to travel
but also to different explorations of the past – I had discovered that my father has been intended by his grandmother and mother to be a pundit. My father hadn't become a pundit. He had instead become a journalist; and his literary ambitions had seeded the literary ambitions of his two sons.¹⁶

Seepersad Naipaul was born in 1906. His father, a Pundit died when he was young, and the family was left in poverty, Seepersad’s elder brother was sent to work in the cane-fields but Seepersad was saved for education. All attempts to make him a pundit failed. He did odd jobs and became a journalist. The following assertion throws light on the debt of influence that Naipaul owes to his father, Seepersad:

My father was extremely important in my childhood; nearly everything that I am because of this great link I felt with him and a lot of my work – especially my early book – I mean to be dedicated to him.¹⁷

Naipaul has pointed out that the writing ambition bounded him with his father all together and literary production appears to have served as an extension of family relation. Naipaul's family also produced another writer in Shiva, whose novel Fireflies covers similar ground to that of A House for Mr Biswas. Naipaul writes:

The writing that has mattered most to me is that of my father, which has never been published. It taught me to look at things that had never been written about before, and seemed dull in life, yet when transformed to paper became surprising. A great deal of my vision of Trinidad has come straight from my father.¹⁸
In his writing, there is a family resemblance. His works expose entrapment in a society of restricted opportunity, frustrated ambition and dreams of escape, and the rituals and customs of Hindu family life. In Seepersad stories, we find a fine blend of an insider’s knowledge of the society with the perceptions of an outsider. His aspiration to see things anew is expressed by the epigraph to the collection of his stories privately printed in Port of Spain. It is a quotation from Robert Burns:

Oh, wad some Pow’r the giftie gie us,  
To see ourselvs as others see us.  

The poet is of the view that some people have the gifted power to see themselves as others see them. It means that they have a critical understanding of their own and have a correct estimate of their position in the society. MacGowan Influenced Seepersad’s writings a lot and taught him how to write perfectly. Naipaul traces MacGowan’s indirect influence on his own writing:

It was through his journalism on MacGowan’s Guardian that my father arrived at that vision of the countryside and its people which he later transferred to his stories. And the stories have something of the integrity of the journalism: they are written from within a community and seem to be addressed to that community: Hindu community essentially, which, because the writer sees it as whole, he can at times make romantic and at other times satirise. There is reformist passion; but even when there is shock, as in “In the Village”, there is nothing of the protest-common in early colonial writing – that implies an outside audience; the barbs are
all turned inwards. This is part of distinctiveness of the stories. I stress it because this way of looking, from being my father’s, became mine; my father’s early stories created background for me.²⁰

Seepersad’s stories adopt contrasting tones and approaches: they blend and romance with documentary detail and a relish for the drama of everyday life. Naipaul admits that Seepersad begins as ‘a writer concerned with the rituals, manners and what he has seen as the romantic essence of this community.’ Naipaul associates some of the freshness of Seepersad’s approach with the influence of Gault MacGowan. From Seepersad, this approach was transferred to V.S. Naipaul. So Naipaul felt his gratitude for Gault MacGowan.

*A House for Mr Biswas* reflects the quality of Seepersad’s vision. Naipaul pays the tribute of literary emulation to his father by depicting the details of his life:

I was writing about things I didn’t know; and the book that came out was very much my father’s book. It was written out of his journalism and stories, out of his knowledge, knowledge he had got from the way of looking MacGowan had trained him in. It was written out of his writing.²¹

V.S. Naipaul through this book pays homage to Seepersad’s memory and writing. It portrays in his fictional counterpart a man incapable of his literary achievement, and tempers tenderness with mockery of its hero. In 1951, Seepersad wrote to his son:
This scene answered something of the political panic I was beginning to feel.

To be a colonial was to know a kind of security; it was to inhabit a fixed world. And I suppose that in my fantasy I had seen myself coming to England as to some purely literary region, where, untrammelled by the accidents of history or background, I could make a romantic career for my self as a writer .......And I found that Conrad - sixty years before in the time of a great peace - had been everywhere before me. Not as a man with a cause, but a man offering .......a vision of the world's half-made societies .......[it was] a kind of truth and half a consolation.

To understand Conrad, then, it was necessary to match his experience.\(^{23}\)

So Naipaul's map is Conrad's writing rather than colonial history, and his quest canonical rather than historical. Naipaul deliberately utilised Conrad's experience as an early beacon during his preparations to become a writer. He follows Conrad's agendas that help him to recognise 'the kind of truth' that his explorations look for. He used to believe that his own personal historical circumstances could be exploited if and when a conveyance between a participant and observer status were enacted, then the panicked young colonial found his solace by escaping into an imaginary realm where his particular historical location would go back into a larger, historical widely spread area of generalised categories. He declared in 1962 that:

Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands.\(^{24}\)
A writer’s place of birth does not necessarily dictate what he or she chooses to write about. The historical circumstances and discursive fields in which and from which a writer learns, however, and in which he participates— and some times changes— do provide helpful referents with which to understand his work.

Naipaul has not his own personal history so he attaches himself closer to the heart of the “borrowed culture.” He has his relation with both, English literature and Caribbean history and according to him the latter is dependent on the former. Naipaul is rationalist, secular, a strong believer in Western individualism and scepticism, as well as he is emotionally attracted towards Indian fatalism, passivity and philosophical views of the world as illusion. Both worlds can be seen vying with each other in his writings.

There was no place in Trinidad for people in Naipaul’s position to whom the complex societies promised nothing except an escape from a life of squalid and aloofness. In a foreign land, it was not easy for a young man a long way from home, to achieve his goal; therefore, ‘the promise of escape’ in Naipaul had attached him to a high literary ambition.

He hated the narrow, circumscribed, brutal life, which surrounded him in colonial Trinidad with its limited range of professions, notorious political corruption and racial and religious conflicts. He felt that traditional Indian culture was decaying, its rituals incongruous in
Trinidad and bound for extinction. The Indians, among whom he lived, had a social world of their own uninvolved with the other races.

The Trinidadian of African descent had no traditional culture of their own and modelled themselves on the English, their humiliation resulting in resentment, a brotherhood of skin and colour. The local whites had produced nothing of lasting significance, was often drunkards, uneducated and privileged. They had the best jobs.

V.S. Naipaul as a colonial writer never accepted the myths and assumptions of western literature and his own culture offers no simple alternatives for, his tradition is oral rather than literary and has been disgraced during the colonial period. And for Naipaul, there was further problem that this New World situation has exiled him from the culture of his ancestors. To Naipaul, the colonial upbringing meant that he came from a world that lacked the stability and intellectual certitudes of a metropolitan society:

"The English or French writer of my age had grown up in a world that was more or less explained. He wrote against a background of knowledge. I couldn’t be a writer in the same way, because to be a colonial, as I was, was to be spread knowledge. It was to live in an intellectually restricted world; it was to accept those restrictions...."

As a Caribbean writer, he had experiences of troubled relation between the lived experience of these communities, classes and ethnic groupings and the false consciousness, or alienation, fostered by colonial education. He was keen to go to Britain for a craft or vocation. He
appreciated fiction, poetry and plays resembling European forms and aesthetic concerns and practices emerged from a part of the glow where they had not existed before. Naipaul’s well known affinity with an English tradition, therefore, is not a betrayal of his origins, but a discovery of one possibility, or even one aspect, of the inevitability of Caribbean and post-colonial literatures.

In an article entitled ‘Jasmine’, Naipaul writes about his own ambivalent reaction to English literature as a young aspiring writer:

The language was ours, to use as we pleased. The literature that came with it was, there, of peculiar. There was, for instance, Wordsworth’s notorious poem about the daffodil. A pretty little flower, no doubt; but we had never seen it. Could the poem have any meaning for us? ... To us, without a mythology, all literatures were foreign. Trinidad was small, remote and unimportant, and we knew we saw about us. Books came from a afar; they could offer only fantasy.²⁶

In part, this was obviously because of the different linguistic, political, historical and social issues at stake. Instead, through a series of gestures aimed at a profound break with the tutelage of colonial subordination. Naipaul, as a colonial writer recognised that he would not need antecedence since, he was beginning to discover, a belief in the absence of precedence could also be one originally mark of postcolonial expression.

He further describes how he attempted to make the books which he read relevant to his own society by a process of adaptation, visualising
Dickens’s rain and fog as tropical downpours, but still felt he lived in a world which was beyond the literary pale:

I might adapt Dickens to Trinidad; but it seemed impossible that the life I knew in Trinidad could ever be turned into a book. If landscapes do not start to be real until they have been interpreted by an artist, so until they have been written about, societies appear to be without shape and embarrassing... Very little of what I read was of help. It would have been possible to assume the sensibility of a particular writer. But no writer, however individual his vision, could be separated by from his society. The vision was alien; it diminished my own and did not give me the courage to do a simple thing like mentioning the name of a Port of Spain street.

Fiction or any work on the imagination, whatever its quality, hallows its subject. To attempt, with a full consciousness of established authoritative mythologies, to give a quality of myth to what was agreed to be petty and ridiculous...required courage. It was in a way, the rejection of the familiar, meaningless word - the rejection of the unknown daffodil to it no higher.²⁷

He recollects in a 1964 essay that:

It helps in the most practical way to have a tradition... the English language was mine; the tradition was not.²⁸

The ability to read and write standard English in an Anglophone Caribbean setting, the satirical edge of Naipaul’s early fiction insists, is
the only claim to legitimacy. This is because this same literacy allows one a place in the larger discursive field of an artificial history.

Naipaul was not satisfied with his youth in Trinidad, so he decided to leave Trinidad. Marking the end of his apprenticeship, Naipaul notes:

To become a writer, that noble thing, I had thought it necessary to leave, actually to writer it was necessary to go back. It was the beginning of self-knowledge.²⁹

While living in Trinidad, he felt that the present atmosphere was not encouraging for a creative artist and he might face many problems so he decided to go back to London and pursue his career. When asked in an interview in 1994 what made him want to write, V. S. Naipaul had replied:

An idea of nobility, a love of the smell of books, a love of the feel of books, a love of lettering, a wish to be famous— all these things.³⁰

The nineteenth century English novel provides a reference point for Naipaul, but its conventions are not altogether adequate for his purposes. Naipaul’s works deal with the subject of colonialism. His works present the combination of colonial factors that account for the social composition of present day societies and politics. To quote Mustafa:

The term “colonial subject” (and Naipaul’s implication within its discernment), therefore, is used in two quite different ways; on the one hand, one that sees it as embodying colonialism’s ability to distort and sometimes deny within its hegemonic discursive practice, a primary enunciatory position for any people within its compass; and on the other,
one that empirically documents colonial patterns. Those critical of Naipaul tend to adapt the former usage, while those who endorse Naipaul’s observations the latter.  

Naipaul’s writing should function as one of the illustrative sites of critics’ efforts to theorise, and problematic, the discourse of colonialism and the construction of the colonial subject. It attempts to locate Naipaul’s work in relation to a social and literary context. He has an extensive debt to Conrad and to his father’s writings. His works are shaped by the indirect influence of the work of other post-colonial writers. He as a colonial writer finds himself aloof from any background, solitary and adrift. His work insists on the nature of individual identity. A tendency to revise and to revisit earlier books is a prominent feature of his output.
Notes


5. Ibid.


8. Ibid, 34.


11. Ibid.


17. Interviewed by Nigel Bingham, p.306.


22. Ibid, p.68.


27. Ibid, p.25.


