

Postcolonial Memories: A Study of *an Area of Darkness*

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ABSTRACT:

*In post-colonial literature many writers have attempted to assert themselves and also tried to establish their identities in the new world. The literary work of these writers is subjective and presents different aspects like multiculturalism, ethnicity and national identity. But the notion of single language, old culture and ethnicity has disappeared in modern global literature. The national identity and subjectivity seems to be assimilating because the modern reader can't identify the writer's identity just by going through the work of the writer. This has happened because many people migrated to different parts of the world which resulted in fusion of various cultures and ethnicities. In fact, these post-colonial writers were either displaced from their roots or they are the immigrants who had left the homeland. After decolonization, these writers tried to restore their identity and subjectivity through their writings. In this category, I will explore the mind set of Naipaul through his novel. The writer is post-colonial and reflects India's culture, history and ethnicity in his novels. He has floating memories of the native land and tries ground them to establish his identity. As he is an alienated from the homeland and also removed from the history of the country, this writer searches for the roots and asserts himself. The paper will discuss *An Area of Darkness* to explore the issues of identity and subjectivity. Post-colonial literature presents the binary opposites of*

orient and occident, colonized and colonizer, black and white and East and West. Naipaul was displaced from India physically and now tried to find a cultural home in England. He also tried to obtain an English identity through acquisition of language and culture of England. But this didn't help him to succeed in his mission. Although, he writes in one language, he didn't have one culture and ethnicity to achieve his motive. As a result he lived a life in the exile world. His writings hang in between the two perspectives, to attach him with the past and to attain future goal. But at the same time he swallows this very past when he wants to float on the mainstream life of the host country. On the other hand Naipaul began his life in exile world and his identity is more complicated. He passes through many cultural shocks to establish his modern identity. He uses fragmentary memories of India to restore his Indian past. In this effort he uses an ambivalent of the two opposites of post-colonial literature. In this paper I will also investigate the reasons which led to the collapse of one language, one culture, and one ethnicity in multicultural post-colonial literature. Finally, I will focus on the concepts of national identity and subjectivity in the above mentioned work of this writer.

KEYWORDS : Identity, Subjectivity, Ethnicity, Multicultural, Post-colonial, Memories



Most of the literary works of postcolonial writers present different perspectives like multiculturalism, ethnicity, national identity, subjectivity and reflexivity. But in recent times these nations of old culture, single language and ethnicity have disappeared. The postcolonial writers were displaced from their roots or they are the immigrants who had left the homeland. The post-colonial literature deals with the two binary aspects of insider and outsider. This paper explores the mind set of Naipaul through his novel *An Area of Darkness*. As a post-colonial writer he has floating memories of the native land and tries to ground them to establish his identity Naipaul began his life as writer in exile world where he uses fragmentary memories of India to restore his Indian past.

In the novel *An Area of Darkness* India seems to be Naipaul's area of Darkness. Here, the question arises, what are the main issues which trouble him most as presented in this novel. The story of this novel is a semi autobiographical account of Naipaul's Journey in India in 1964. He spent almost a year in different parts of India. He seems to have a pre-determined conviction of speaking all against India. He depicts the plight of the Eastern world, not only of India, but of Africa as well. The writer who to full of preconceived notions about India expresses a bitter experience of his one year stay in India. It seems to me that he has written the book *An Area of Darkness* with a set temperament of criticizing India and its people. The picture of India, which he describes during his visit, was too severe and cruel for him and he could not maintain

an objective eye to look at it and he could not bear the red-tapism as he has a bitter experience at Bombay dock at the customs twice. He feels quite frustrated for getting the liquor permit as he visits New Customs office trice. At this office, when he asks a clerk to get him a glass of water, he is ignored and he feels quite insulted. But later a he realizes Indian modality that, "A clerk was a clerk, and a messenger is a messenger". He also presorts a daring picture of the squatting people in the dust streets, ragged, whining beggars and the country full of dirt and dust.

In this novel, Naipaul presents India from three major perspectives i.e. the third world nation full of poverty and the colonial past. He describes the societies, people and their lives of the countries like, India, Pakistan, Malaysia and Africa. He has chosen the post-colonial world as has subject matter for the most of his writings because he had determined to become a well known and great writer. The writer who lived in London thinks that third world countries are full of humiliation and tyranny, there is no human right and even no equality between men and women Naipaul gives an account of his father who had left India, but refused to accept Trinidad. He loved India and its culture. He also followed Indian customs and traditions and was not tempted by foreign culture. But Naipaul admits that his tastes along with the other family members were changing. He was tempted by the food style of different countries i.e. Portuguese stew of tomato and onions and the Negro's way of yams, bread fruit and Bananas. He accepts that he has been influenced by the



foreign culture. He did not find any pleasure in Hinduism and its ceremonies. He asserts that the Hindu rituals seemed ridiculous to him. In the first part of the novel he mocks at the Janaywa or the thread ceremony of the new born. He also criticized the customs of shaving the head taking up his staff and bundle and announcing his intention of going to Kasi Banaras to study:

I come of a family that abounded with pundits. But I had been born an unbeliever. I took no pleasure in religious ceremonies. They were too long and the food come only at the end. And the food came at the end. I did not understand the language – it was as if our elders expected that our understanding would be instinctive and no and explained the prayers or the rituals. One ceremony was like another (36).

Naipaul seems to compare Indian past in terms of colonial past of Trinidad. Both countries were the colonies of the British. England dominates the mind set of Naipaul not only as reside of this country but also as a former colonial ruler over India and Trinidad. Naipaul examines the Indian colonial past and its influence on contemporary Indian situation. He finds the colonial experience of India as the source of all the inadequacies he describes in this novel. In *An Area of Darkness* his attitude and description of Mahatma Gandhi serves mainly as representative of western ideas and vision of the world and stands in contrast to the rest of the major Indian society. He finds Gandhi as a failure revealing his own ambivalence towards India and Gandhi. Gandhi has conscious mess of the squalor and filth of India because he was a true

colonial aware of the horrors of subjugation and degradation of the colonial rule in India. Naipaul finds people forced to defecate in public all over India and also applauds the sanitation efforts of Gandhi. But Naipaul finds Gandhi's approach to Hinduism to mobilize support and to convert it into a national movement also lead to his failure, although he succeeds politically for a time. But, as a result he becomes Mahatma who could then be ignored while being worshipped. Gandhi also tried to shake up the social order but it rose up against him and as a result become more static. So, to the masses, Gandhi becomes a figure venerated by all Hindus. Here, Naipaul not only tries to explain the failure of Gandhi but also tries to make the distinction between class and caste. Caste, according to Naipaul bounds man in its function that is a man is born to perform the function of his caste and hence must do it to the best of his ability. But in modern times, this is at variance with human nature that seeks material incentives.

According to Naipaul, India does not have anything to fall back upon except of its archaic ideas which failed because of five hundred years mogul rule and almost two hundred years colonial period? Its modern political and legal systems can only lead to hollow imitations of post Raj because they could not be assimilated in true nature. Indian civilization and culture met the European at a time of social disintegration and even political anarchy. It was the impact of the west with its new ideas and in many respects opposite civilization values. The British high lightened the weaknesses of

traditional social order of the Indians. They declared the Indian culture, race and even religion as inferior. At this point of time Gandhi tried to see India with a western eye through his long experience of aboard. And as a result whole Indian society is centered on Gandhi:

The observer, the failed reformer, is of course Mohandas Gandhi, Mahatma, great souled, father of the nation, deified, his name is given to streets and parks and squares, honored every where by statues and mandaps [.....], he is never the less the learn Indian of Indian leaders.(28)

The story of the novel *An Area of Darkness* abounds with the descriptions of extreme poverty of Indian people. Naipaul describes India as the poorest country in the world. He says that Indian defecate everywhere but fail to accept the fact. Further, Naipaul highlights, beggary has its special position in India and cannot be judged from the Europium perspectives. Beggars, here have a secure position with the society. It has become a part and parcel of Indian society. Beggary has its function because every act of given to the beggar is seen as the automate act of charity, which is an automatic reverence to God” (68). Naipaul observes that defecating belongs to India in the same way beggary. It has also become a ritual. People just walk in the streets full of excrements thought noticing. The reason for it is that most of the Indian prefer defecation in an open air. It has become their daily routine and even habit.

In the second part of the novel Naipaul analyses the whole colonial process. Racial demarcation of the Caribbean required by

the logic of both slavery and colonization Naipaul himself admits that his contacts with members of other races were minimal and he only met with the people of other ethnic group only during official contacts, while living in London also he has minimum corrects with people of other races:

I have been rebuked by writers from the West Indies, and notably George Lamming, for not paying sufficient attention in my books to non – Indian groups. The conformation of different communities, he said, was fundamental West Indian experience.(30)

Naipaul again asserts that when he came to London and it had become the centre of his world. Then also he did not accept it as the centre of his world. In this regard he says that I had been misled:

But there was now here to go. It was good place for getting lost in, a city no one ever know, a city explored from the natural heart outward until, after years, it defined itself into a Jumble of clearings separated by stretches of the unknown, through which the narrowest of paths had been cut ----- . All mythical lands faded, and in the big city I was confined to a smaller world than I had ever known. I become my flat, my desk, my name. (35)

Naipaul's identity plays a crucial role in his novels. His ambiguity in terms of his national feeling and belonging to a particular country is the main predisposition for his perception of India. Although he grew up in a Hindu community in Trinidad and he remains detached from the country of his grandfather. He discusses the result of hundred year's separation between those in Trinidad and those in India. This led to the emergence of two distinctive cultures. The real India is completely different from what Naipaul dreamt of as being his home land. He finds that real India has nothing in common with the India of his imaginations. His forefathers who moved to Trinidad cherished their memories and traditions and it become source of his ideal thoughts of his mother country:

The India, then which was the back ground to my childhood was an area of the imagination. It was not the real country I presently began to read about and whose map I committed to memory -----.
I was without belief or interest in belief; I was incapable of worship, of God or holy men; and so one whole side of India was closed to me. (37).

So, Naipaul realizes that his image of India is not adequate and feels a kind of separateness and distance from this India. This novel is not only about the failure of India which Naipaul dreamt of, but also of failure of his myth of childhood. Naipaul's identity is strongly connected to his

imaginary world. So, with the loss of his ideals, the loss of his identity appears immediately. He feels a kind of alienation and not knowing who he really is, because he fails to identify himself with Indians:

In India, I had so far felt myself a visitor. Its size its temperatures its crowds: I had prepared myself for there, but in its very extremes the country was alien. Looking for the familiar, I had again in spite of myself, become an-islander: I was looking for the small and manageable from the day of my arrival I had learned that racial similarities means little. (148-149)

Nevertheless, Naipaul has her contradictory-feelings about his homeland. Still he feels very strong bonds to this India. He is in a state of distress because of his rootlessness, because he does not feel to be an Indian. Whereas, on the other hand, he is quite frustrated when he is denied his dissimilarity from Indians;

Now in Bombay I entered a shop or restaurant and awaited a special quality of response. And there was nothing. It was like a demised part of any reality. [--] had been made by Trinidad and England; recognition of my difference was necessary to me. I feel the need to impose myself, and did not know how. (39)

This feeling of separateness and disillusion leads Naipaul nearly to complete negation of India and its culture. He even mentions this at the end of the novel.

It was only now, as my experience of India defined itself more properly against my own homelessness, that I saw how close in the past year I had been to the total India negation, how much it had become the basis of thought and feeling. (251)

Thus to read Naipaul's novel *An Area of Darkness* is synonymous with reading his subjective religious or philosophical view. Naipaul tries to empower himself through his writings. So, like his father he also tries to construct his home. And through his creative writing he tries to construct his own identity and – subjectivity. He also makes an effort to resist the sense of insecurity and of uncertainty. He is an exile writer caught in between home and homelessness. He creates his own space by expressing the dilemmas and struggles of the colonized people. He also tries to make both his individual as well as social life meaningful in postcolonial context. The People of the colonial world who are devoid of their own culture customs and traditions, religion and race- consider themselves inferior and try to identify with their colonial masters. But they could not associate themselves with the alien culture and suffer from dislocations, rootlessness and finally loss of identity. Naipaul points out the main psychological problem which remained even after independence. Now the

people in Modern India, once colonized, see themselves as lost in their postcolonial society that fails to offer a sense of national unity and identity. In this regard Rohler points out:

The position of ironist in colonial society is indeed a delicate one, the early Naipaul is at times the irresponsible ironist --- satire is the sensitive measure of a society's departure from the norm inherent in itself --- this explains the measure of force and social canorousness which occurs on the two early novel. (51)

But at last Naipaul laments at the end of his *Journey* and even regrets that his journey to India has left him scarred and wounded.

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