



## A Critical study of Sir V.S. Naipaul's Major Travelogues

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### ABSTRACT

Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, honored with the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature, immensely gifted, exasperatingly a controversial man and generally considered the leading writer of the English-speaking Caribbean, occupies an eminent place among the most widely read and admired literary figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century English literature. He has a uniquely authoritative position as an interpreter of Oriental, Caribbean and Caribbean societies.

He is widely known as one of the masters of Modern English travel writing. The Middle Passage is his first representative travelogue which focuses the post-colonial and the Caribbean world. It depicts his keen interest in getting laudable perfection in travel writing. It is an outstanding part of Naipaul's different traveling's into the Caribbean and South American societies. Commenting on the art and ideas of Naipaul as employed in the travel book, Serafin Roldan-Santiago aptly writes:-

“Naipaul first travel narrative The Middle Passage includes in seminal form all the travel writing strategies that he would later use. It will be noted that he had already integrated into his travel narrative strands of irony, the literary image, and his thematic ideas of pessimism and dissolution.”

He travels to different places not with an objective to reach far-off countries but to see life in a new way. Travelogue is a genre of historically realistic fictional work, more than a tourist guide and is certainly more than a graphic record of the places and personal impressions of the sojourner. This paper focused on major travelogues of Sir V.S. Naipaul especially Oriental, Caribbean and South American societies.

**Keywords:** V.S. Naipaul, India, West Indies, Islam, Controversial, Caribbean

Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, a travel observer, a Trinidadian novelist and an essayist of the Indo-Trinidadian descent, is one of the foremost spokes persons in English prose of the post-colonial and Caribbean world. He is regarded as one of the masters of modern English travel writing. He is probably the most controversial writer to emerge from the Caribbean. His creative works comprise novels, short stories and non-fictional writings including travelogues. His traveling has played an outstanding role in shifting his writings from fiction to non-fiction in the form of his travelogues. Edward states that:

“...Naipaul has become Sir V S Naipaul, an extremely famous and, it must be said, very talented writer whose novels and non-fiction (mostly travel books) have established his reputation as one of the truly celebrated, justly well-known figures in world literature today.”

V.S. Naipaul, a prominent but controversial figure in contemporary literature, seems to have taken such a position in constructing the knowledge about the 'other' in the postcolonial world. Naipaul has been the subject of numerous serious studies and his position as a postcolonial writer is widely discussed in the present day literary context. He has constructed knowledge about India, Africa, Caribbean and the Islamic world through his texts. He wrote in this travel book:



“The history of the island can never be told satisfactorily. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies”.

The countries he has visited became a new foundation of gratuity. Journey's to Trinidad, Islamic countries, India and South America opened up a new source of experience and observations. All his travelogues have been a travel made out of curiosity and interest to understand the Third World countries. The contrast between the sophisticated westernized selves and the Third world countries has made him travel far and wide. Shakespeare stated that:

“Home Keeping youths have ever homely wits. I would rather entreat thy company to see wonders of the world abroad than, living dully sluggardized at home, wear out thy youth with shapeless idleness”.

There is no denying, however, that Naipaul is one of the most significant contemporary travel writers in English. Continued interest in books like *The Middle Passage*, *The Loss of El Dorado*, *The Return of Eva Peron with the Killings in Trinidad*, *Among the Believers* and *Finding the Centre* not only testifies to the fact that they are fascinating travel texts but also relates to the author's status as a postcolonial travel writer visiting countries in the process of decolonization. The fact that he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001 has enhanced his reputation as a writer whose voice demands attention.

Naipaul is a writer of brilliant techniques which he employed in his fiction, particularly his post-colonial texts. His many travels in different parts of the world are colored by his colonial past as Korte (2011) suggests:

“If travel is of special pertinence to Britain's former colonies, the travel is of special pertinence to Britain's former colonies, the travel writing produced in these parts of the world has been practically ignored by scholars until recently with the prominent exception of V.S. Naipaul.” (p.301)

The importance of Naipaul's mission supports his real intentions of his travels and the writing of his travelogues. The way Naipaul controls the language of the narration to create the meaning for his reader is significant too. The application of his novelistic skill to writing travelogues has made his travel narratives different from mere documentaries. The accounts seem to be more fictional than real although they cover many facts and truths simultaneously.

An *Area of Darkness* is V.S.Naipaul's emotional journey to India, home of his ancestors. The book focuses on the experiences and reactions of writer as his journey across India about his roots and past. It was a journey undertaken with expectation for answers on questions of home and identity. Naipaul's next book *India: A Million Mutinies* gives his account of postcolonial experiences. This book shares the notion of home coming. After coming back to India Naipaul perceives million mutinies of castes, of class and of gender. His use of the word 'mutinities' in the title of his book indicates that his writings still have tensions of the colonial discourse. His travelling to the Islamic countries with two major books: *They are Among the Believers: an Islamic Journey* (1981) and *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursion* (1998). He writes in this novel his visits to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Malaysia and Iran have been portrayed in these books. He focuses on the strength and weakness of the Islamic fundamentalism.

*The Masque of Africa* is his recent journey of Africa. It is a quest through the continent for the spirit of African belief, the belief systems that preceded the arrival of Christianity and Islam.



Naipaul's journey across the continent takes him from Uganda, where he lived for a short while in the 1960s, to Nigeria, then to Gabon via the Ivory Coast and Ghana, and finally to South Africa. Along the way, he meets and talks to people about their beliefs.

V.S. Naipaul changed the way the fiction is understood and written, without qualification. As he has said so well,

"The books have to look after themselves, and they will be around as long as people find that they are illuminating".

His books will certainly look after themselves, taking on the personified life of text living on outside and apart from their author. Naipaul is, foremost, an ascetic writer, dedicated to seeing the world clearly and without sentimentality. He has often said, "Good writers have always looked for truth".

To sum up it can be said that, a perceptive study of Naipaul's 'literary fount' reveals, that he subsists, entirely under the interpretation, of colonial culture whose journeys from that of his childhood Trinidad to the British-London and then in nearly most of the colonial spheres in finding the center -where he experiences several colonialisms -are spatially and temporally wide ranging. This could account for the diverse reactions that his travel books always seem to engender. At the same time, Naipaul's travel books also hint at the varied, often complex facets of an intriguing writer who cannot help making an autobiography out of his travelogues.

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