

# Naipaul's *India: A Million Mutinies Now*: A Political Perspective

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## I. INTRODUCTION

V.S. Naipaul was born in Trinidad to parents of Indian descent. He is a postcolonial writer, who has focused much on the legacy of colonialism of the British Empire through his writings. His novels are situated both in the colonial as well as ex-colonial societies. The New York Review of Books celebrates him as "a master of modern English prose. The major themes of his novels are linked with the problems of the colonized people. The present article attempts to show the impact of the colonial rule on the politics of the rulers of independent India. The author compels irresistible aesthetic pull in his projection of the politics of the Indian rulers after the end of British colonial rule. In his book *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, Naipaul argues that the differences on the basis of class, caste, gender, religion lead to million mutinies i.e. fragmentation of Indian society. The political leadership is responsible for the infighting among Indians on various issues such as region, religion, caste or language. Castes dominate the political scenario in India. National issues are neglected often at the expense of the local ones. Politicians are more concerned about their own well being than the nation. There is loss of culture, tradition and religious identity. There is hardly any attempt made to preserve and propagate the Indian culture, language and religious beliefs. Contrary to this all out efforts are made to westernize the Indian society by promoting the language and culture of the colonizers. The satirical portrayal by Naipaul of Indian separatism, regionalism and its split into diverse groups depicts the divisive policies followed by the Indian rulers. In Lillian Feder's considered opinion, V.S. Naipaul

"... has been acclaimed for his penetration into the lasting impairment of postcolonial societies, especially the deprivations of individuals who inherited a history, and he has been excoriated as reactionary loyal to imperialist values" (Naipaul's Truth, 1)

Naipaul believes that India continues to naively believe in its unity and secularism despite the fact that it has never been one and that its unity has always been spurious. The talk of secularism by the politicians is just slogan to show their secular character. Perhaps Rushdie has aptly observed:

"Now it can be argued forcefully that the idea of secularism in India has never been much more than a slogan; that the very fact of religious block voting proves this to be so; that the divisions between the communities have by no means been subsumed in a common 'Indian' identity; and that it is strange to speak of nationalism when the main impetus in present-day India comes from regionalist, separatist political groups." (Imaginary Homelands, 385)

The ultimate goal of post-colonialism is to account for and combat the residual effects of colonialism on cultures. It is not simply concerned with salvaging the past worlds, but learning how the world can move beyond this period together, towards a place of mutual respect. The works of Naipaul has been interpreted by a number of critics from a variety of angles; he has been read as postcolonial and postmodern writer. Rob Nixon appreciates Naipaul's expertise on the issue of cross cultural relationships. Nixon reads the travel narratives of Naipaul as his commitment to the ... "idealized imperial England of his imaginings..." (*London Calling*, 37) Fawzia Mustafa is pained by Naipaul's "misperceptions and inappropriate inquiries" with regard to "Third-world issues." (Fawzia Mustafa, 1, 2) Colonialism is justified by Samuel Huntington for its idealization and universalization of European civilization. He describes the Diasporas as "intellectual migrants to the West." According to Fawzia Mustafa, Naipaul's link with language and resultant intellect is "partially responsible for his implication with in colonial discursive practice." (Fawzia Mustafa, 1, 2) SelwinCudjoe terms Naipaul's work as "imperialist" in its intent. According to Irving Howe, "Naipaul writes with a strict refusal of romantic moonshine about the moral charms of primitives or virtues of blood strained dictators... He is the scourge of our disenchanted age, as free colonialist bias as of infatuation with Third world delusions" (SelwinCudjoe, 265-266). Naipaul finds a strong defender of his works in shape of Brent Staples who comments, "Few writers of V.S. Naipaul's stature have been so consistently and aggressively misread on account of ethnic and racial literary politics..." (Brent Staples, 1)

In Naipaul's *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, Naipaul has made a scrutiny of non-fictional and anecdotal narration of his observations (about India) he makes during his sojourn in India. His presentation of India in ravages, in disappointing examples and depressive specificities as meted-out to her, by implication, during and in the wake of foreign-rule in its expected, usual and cruel dynamics inspire his tear-mingled sympathy and a sense of wrong for the harmless and guileless India and the Indian way of life. Nevertheless, he compensates his hurt by the consolation he feels by adverting to the economic growth in India which, he feels, has salvaged and emancipated millions of Indians which he thinks tantamount to the Mutiny of 1857 by analogy. Domination of the British during the colonial rule made the Indians work as slaves. Even after independence Indians have not developed their independent thought; they lack political awareness, determination and political will. Indian independence led to many subsequent upheavals within the country. Naipaul describes the affect of colonial rule which can be seen even after independence:

“...What was true of Bombay was true of other parts of India as well; of the state of Andhra, of Tamil Nadu, Assam, the Punjabi All over India scores of particularities that had been frozen by foreign rule, or by poverty or lack of opportunity or abjectness, had begun to flow again ....”(6)

The Indians became weak because of centuries of subjection of them by colonial rule. The Indians had wrong notion that irrespective of who ruled the culture is to remain the same. “The country was run on principles that assumed that kings would change; the case would be fought, out that society would go on, pretty much undisturbed by those events.” (159)

Naipaul is of the view that even after the independence the Indian leaders and the people are yet to come out of the affect of their Ex-masters. The period after independence can be termed as ‘neo colonialism’. Indians continue to derive strength by imitating their ‘Ex – masters’. Their dress and working style was imitated. Dr Ambedakar the chairman of the draft committee of Indian constitution wore a European – style jacket and tie.

Colonialism had negative effect on Indian culture, there was loss of values, traditions and language domination has its effect on the ruled who think the rulers as superior people. Naipaul shows the political necessity of the rulers to work for the welfare of people. The Lords and Maharajas who are the rulers are wealthy people. They work for social and development causes, as such perform their duty towards society, so that they remain acceptable and tolerable to the masses.

“.... The royal family of Mysore had been known for the their great wealth, second only to fabulous but idle wealth of the Nizam of Hyderabad, but also for their responsibility as rulers, their pride in their state and their people. They had been known as builders of colleges and hospitals and irrigation systems, plantation of roadside trees and big public gardens...” (150)

The Colonizers also used to plan and execute new plans and projects for the Indians so that they could be looked upon by the masses as true rulers who work for their welfare.

The promotion of English language by Indians by running English schools after independence is a clear influence of west, which we can term as neo colonialism. Subramaniam describes to Naipaul:

“...I went to an English medium school. But it was a very Indian school. It was run by people who were orthodox Hindus, but convinced that we had to learn English, science and technology... (160)

Champa Rao Mohan in the book entitled ‘Postcolonial Situation in The Novels Of V.S Naipaul Writes that “...political independence has changed nothing and the imperialist states continue to retain their hold on the former colonies through newer, more camouflaged methods of neocolonialism... (9).

The story of Kala’s mother who went to British schools and was good in sports, academics and music, also she was bold and confident. This shows that with an interaction by an Indian with British one gets the qualities which the rulers possess. Ngugi Wa Thiango one of the prominent writers of Kenya has rightly pointed out that “language carries culture and culture carries ...the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world.”(220, Ngugi Wa Thiango)

Naipaul shows how the colonial effect on Indians continued after independence. The celebration of win by D.M.K. in Madras woodland hotel depicted that Indians are still to relieve

themselves from the influence of culture of the west. Colonialism had negative effect on Indian culture, there was loss of values, traditions, religious beliefs and language domination has its effect on the ruled who think the rulers as superior people. Naipaul shows how Nikhil, who belongs to the Hindu family, talks of his belief in the Jesus Christ. He gives the logic of his belief in Christ. He is burdened by one legal problem and with his “devotion to the Image of Infant Jesus” (140) the legal problem disappeared. Naipaul describes the colonial affect on the Indians:

“...They had created in India something not of India, simplicity, something where the Indian past had been abolished. And after 450 years all they had left behind this emptiness and simplicity was their religion, their language...the image of infant Jesus. (142)

The influence of the west on the postcolonial societies is the issue of discussion and writings of the postcolonial writers. Carribean novelist while writing about Barbados of 1950’s writes that he is shaken by the thought that “how [Britain]...could have achieved the miracle of being called the Mother. It had made us pupils to its language and its institution, baptized in the same religion...” (George Lamming, 111)

The Indians are not self dependent people, they need some kind of support from outside to grow, and they lacked confidence in their own abilities. They are hardly bothered about who rule the country, only mattered was that state of affairs remaining the same.

The Maharajas lost their power after independence. Even they lost their titles. The loss of titles of the Maharajas further lowered their status. To regain the lost political and social status the sons of Ex-Maharajas started contesting elections to parliament, it is difficult to remain out of power when once you have remained powerful. The son of former Maharajas joined congress and became Member of Parliament. The issues of misrule and oppression are raised by parties to attain power but parties themselves become the symbol of oppression and suppression when they have taste of power.

The Zamindars exploits the laborers by not giving them minimum wages. The Zamindari system reflects the influence of the British who used Indians as slaves and exploited them. In the post-colonial period the Zamindars in India are following the legacy of the ex-colonizers, the British. The postcolonial politics of the rulers of independent India depict that Indians are still to liberate themselves from the negative aspects which pose serious threat to political and social system of the country. The denial of rights and exploitation of the laborers is painful. The Zamindars exploits the laborers by not giving them minimum wages. Naipaul shows how the Zamindari system of the colonial political system which exploited the landless labor before independence still persists and exploitation continues as Zamindars are needed by the politicians for the political support by the political players and the parties. The financially weak laborers are under the thumb of the Zamindars and to the extent that they cast their votes according to the wishes of their masters. Naipaul is critical of Zamindari system which exploits the laborers:

“...The Zamindars employed women for three rupees a day and men for five rupees a day. The minimum wage at that time was five rupees for women and nine for men...” (275)

Edward Said gives his views on the social, economic and political conditions of postcolonial countries. He says that “In our time direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism . . . . ., lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general culture sphere as well as in specific political ideological, economic and social practices,” (Said, Edward, 8)

The Democrats (D.M.K.) of Tamil Nadu became imperialists. Power got to their heads and they hardly bothered about to look into the problems of public interest. They ignored real issues and following the imperialistic policy degraded the democratic institutions. It is the common trend of the political parties that after attaining power promises made during elections are forgotten and are remembered again during the next elections.

In the chapter entitled ‘After the Battle’ Naipaul shows how the effect of powerful west remained on the Indians even after independence. The Indians constructs their houses in accordance with European styles thought it proved ineffective in the in the Indian conditions.

Colonial language (English) helped Debu to rise in party as man knowing English was considered superior. The Indians considered their own language and culture to be inferior because of country’s subjection to century’s foreign rule. Naipaul describes:

“... and Debu found that being a foreign returned person and an English speaker was helping him up even in the communist party (Marxist)...” (335)

To conclude it can be said that the Indian polity is still very much under the influence of the policies and principles followed by the colonizers to rule the country. The society is still divided on the basis of caste, creed and religion. The ruling class considers themselves as superior and enjoys the political power at the expense of deprivation of basic amenities to the poor and needy. The politics is not aimed to create the bonds of unity in the masses belonging to different sections of society; rather they make all out efforts to create divisions in the society. This makes the task of their coming to power easier as the divided society does not pose threat to their continuation of remaining in power. The politicians hardly make efforts to save and propagate the Indian languages, culture and rich heritage; rather they have become promoters of English education and western culture. It is rather painful that even after the years of independence, the

Indians are not having the independent thinking of their own and the political system still runs on the borrowed institutions and instead of making efforts to frame the policies for the betterment of the society, the politicians are indulged in the game of minting money through corrupt practices. The colonizers exploited the country and its masses, the present day rulers follow the legacy of their ex-masters.

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