

### 31. Critical Responses to V.S. Naipaul's India<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract

In his travelogue *An Area of Darkness*, Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul is claimed to provide a satirical and biased analysis of Indian society, concentrating on issues such as poverty, pollution, religion, caste-system, political passivity, and colonialism. Even though the literary skills that Naipaul displays in his text evoke admiration, his approach towards India is not welcomed. Numerous critics accuse him of being a biased, prejudiced, and racist writer who attempts to distort the reality of his native country due to his assimilated, Western self. Naipaul, on the other hand, firmly rejects any accusations regarding his intention behind writing the travel book. This article, therefore, comparatively analyzes the criticisms directed at Naipaul's portrayal of India in *An Area of Darkness*, alongside Naipaul's self-defense, while employing Stuart Hall's "cultural identity theory" within cultural studies to identify and discuss the underlying reasons behind the author's predominantly negative observations and interpretations of his homeland. Through a comparative method, the study first examines the views of critics such as White, Bakari, Ezekiel, Mahan, Masih, Iyer, Bhosale, Mahanta, Gupta, Walsh, Paicu, Chaubey and Biswas who find Naipaul's portrayal of India misleading. Then, by referring to Naipaul's texts and speeches, it includes the author's self-defense in response to the criticisms directed at him. Thus, it concludes that the author's individual disillusionment with his homeland, resulting from his identity conflict, mental and psychological disconnection from his culture, and his selective perception in the process of artistic creation, causes him to construct his own reality of India. Finally, it interprets the findings through the lens of Stuart Hall's "cultural identity theory," linking Naipaul's aforementioned dilemmas to his multilayered and diasporic identity. It also highlights the significant contributions of travel writing to the relevant social sciences.

**Keywords:** Naipaul, travelogue, cultural misrepresentation, identity conflict, diasporic identity

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### V.S. Naipaul'un Hindistan'ına Eleştirel Yanıtlar<sup>3</sup>

#### Öz

Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul'un, *An Area of Darkness* adlı seyahatnamesinde, yoksulluk, kirlilik, din, kast sistemi, siyasi pasiflik ve sömürgecilik gibi konulara odaklanarak, Hindistan toplumunu hicivli ve önyargılı bir şekilde analiz ettiği iddia edilir. Naipaul'un eserinde sergilediği edebi becerileri hayranlık uyandırsa da Hindistan'a olan yaklaşımı genel olarak hoş karşılanmaz. Eleştirmenler tarafından, asimile olmuş batılı benliği nedeniyle kendi ülkesinin gerçekliğini çarpıtmaya çalışan yanlı, önyargılı ve ırkçı bir yazar olmakla suçlanır. Naipaul ise seyahat kitabını yazmasının ardındaki niyetine ilişkin suçlamaları kesin bir dille reddeder. Bu makale, Naipaul'un *An Area of Darkness* eserindeki Hindistan tasvirine yönelik eleştirileri Naipaul'un öz savunması ile birlikte karşılaştırmalı olarak ele alır ve elde edilen bulguları Stuart Hall'un kültürel çalışmalar kapsamındaki "kültürel kimlik teorisi" ile analiz ederek yazarın anavatanına dair tespit ve yorumlarının çoğunlukla olumsuz olmasının ardındaki gerçek sebepleri bulmayı ve tartışmayı amaçlar. Çalışma, ilk olarak, White, Bakari, Ezekiel, Mahan, Masih, Iyer, Bhosale, Mahanta, Gupta, Walsh, Paicu, Chaubey ve Biswas gibi, Naipaul'un Hindistan tasvirini yanıltıcı bulan eleştirmenlerin görüşlerini karşılaştırmalı bir metotla analiz eder. Ardından, Naipaul'un metinlerine ve konuşmalarına atıfta bulunarak, yazarın kendisine yöneltilen eleştirilere cevaben yaptığı öz savunmasına yer verir. Böylelikle, Naipaul'un, kimlik çatışması, kültürüne olan zihinsel ve psikolojik uzaklığı ve sanatsal yaratım sürecindeki seçici algısından kaynaklanan anavatanıyla ilgili kişisel hayal kırıklığını, yazarın kendi Hindistan gerçekliğini inşa etmesine yol açtığı sonucuna varır. Son olarak, elde edilen bu bulguyu, Stuart Hall'un "kültürel kimlik teorisi" ışığında yorumlayarak, Naipaul'un bahsi geçen çıkmazlarını yazarın çok katmanlı ve diasporik bir kimliğe sahip olması ile ilişkilendirir ve seyahat yazınının ilgili sosyal bilimlere sağladığı katkının altını çizer.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Naipaul, seyahatname, kültürel yanıltma, kimlik çatışması, diasporik kimlik

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In his travel book entitled *An Area of Darkness*, Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul critiques Indian society through various pivotal themes such as poverty, pollution, religion, caste-system, political passivity or indifference and colonialism in a satirical way. While Naipaul is praised for his artistic ability, he is criticized by a wide array of writers, poets, critics, reviewers, and readers for his style, narration, point of view, and choice of examples to illustrate India and Indian society. His attitude towards Indians is frequently considered to be racist, prejudiced, and merciless. His criticism is often discussed to consist of unfair accusations, strict judgments and unrealistic or exaggerated portrayals. He is usually accused of judging Indian culture from his Western point of view without the necessary background and therefore falsify the reality of current problems. For all these reasons, Naipaul is labeled a “controversial writer,” as White describes in his book entitled *V.S. Naipaul: A Critical Introduction*, who is “blamed by [even] West Indian critics for racial arrogance and by their English counterparts for contenting himself with being charming” (White, 1975, p.2). As seen in the comparison made by Professor Mohamed Bakari in his article titled “V.S. Naipaul: From Gadfly to Obsessive,” he is now considered as “the bete noir of postcolonial writers and intellectuals” because of the racist attitude in his works. A careful examination of the common characteristics of the criticism of Naipaul also reveals that the author’s tendency to portray India negatively may also stem from his individual disillusionment with and mental and psychological disconnection from his homeland, his exile / double consciousness, and his identity conflict that results from all this. This paper aims to discuss the reasons why most of the author’s portrayals of the homeland are negative, by analyzing the critical responses to Naipaul’s depiction of India in his *An Area of Darkness*, considering the author’s self-defense in his answer to the criticisms directed at him, and addressing Stuart Hall’s critical identity theory.

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the writers who criticizes Naipaul’s representation of India. Before examining the specific points of disagreement with Naipaul, it is crucial to comprehend Ezekiel’s relationship with India. Ezekiel is a poet and writer who is “closely interested in India’s social, political, financial and cultural problems and identifies himself with India” despite his “very special situation” in relation to India as a poet, a person and a citizen (Chindhade, 2001, p.57). “He sees himself within the ambiguous perspectives of the inside-outsider” by reason of “his Jewish-westernized-Indian background” as Shaila Mahan notes; however, he still defines himself as an “Indian nationalist” (Mahan, 2001, p.47). Being a citizen has a different meaning for Ezekiel; it is beyond political definitions. “I am not a Hindu, and my background makes me a natural outsider; circumstances and decisions relate me to India,” Ezekiel says to define his idea of citizenship and identity (Lall, 1983, p.66). Since he decides to love India under these conditions, he criticizes the way Naipaul portrays India.

In his article entitled “Naipaul’s India and Mine,” Ezekiel argues how different Naipaul’s representation of India from his. Although he acknowledges some points of agreement with Naipaul, he asserts that Naipaul’s descriptions fail to accurately introduce India.

My quarrel with Mr. Naipaul, which I hope to conduct in a way that will be understandable to him, is not because of these condemnatory judgments of his, so fiercely, so blazingly expressed. My quarrel is that Mr. Naipaul is so often uninvolved and unconcerned. He writes exclusively from the point of view his own dilemma, his temperamental alienation from his mixed back-ground, his choice and his escape. (Naipaul’s India and Mine by Ezekiel, 1976, p.194)

Ezekiel claims that Naipaul’s “temperament” is not universal. It’s “wholly subjective and self-righteous.” He claims that Naipaul’s discomfort is “extreme” and emphasizes that he, in *An Area of Darkness*, expresses his “extreme discomfort” based on “his own expectations” only. Therefore, according to Ezekiel, the examples, stories, and experiences Naipaul presents in his book “nearly undermines the

validity of his arguments" (Ezekiel, 1976, pp.194-5).

Reminding us of the people Naipaul encounters, the places he visits, and the events he experiences, Ezekiel draws our attention to Naipaul's *examples*. He asserts that Naipaul "keeps running into obtuse, unsympathetic Indians, bland, silly and incapable of understanding his simplest problems" (Ezekiel, 1976, p.195). He seems to challenge Naipaul's readers to question his choice of characters when he says:

Most of the persons Mr. Naipaul met in India were grotesques, contemptible or pathetic creatures. He writes about them at great length as though they are important illustrations of his argument. Mrs. Mhindra of New Delhi, who is "craze for foreign," sprawls over several pages. M. S. Butt, proprietor of Hotel Liward in Srinagar, and his assistant Aziz, the boy from Bombay who comes to stay in Hotel Liward, are others of the same kind. (Ezekiel, 1976, p.202)

Ezekiel evokes readers to ponder whether Naipaul's encounters with these people are coincidentally. He correlatively promotes them to question whether including only such extreme examples in a book about a country may misrepresent that country. Ezekiel also asks whether Naipaul may be responsible for his negative experiences with these people. "What is to be thought of a man who writes, 'I stood in the shade of Churchgate Station and debated whether I had it in me to cross the exposed street to the Tourist Office?'" (Ezekiel, 1976, p.195).

One can get the impression that Ezekiel utilizes Naipaul's book to redefine *his own perception of India* while juxtaposing his ideas with those of Naipaul. In almost all the comparisons in his essay, Ezekiel keeps saying "in Naipaul's India" and "in my India." For instance, while criticizing Naipaul's choice of characters and plot, Ezekiel refers to a specific episode from Naipaul's memories. In this episode, when Naipaul goes to the New Customs House and his companion faints, he asks for water for the worker but no one responds (Naipaul, 2002, pp.26-7). Naipaul becomes irritated and exclaims "of course nobody helps because a clerk is a clerk; a messenger is a messenger" (Naipaul, 2002, p.27). This anecdote of Naipaul refers to the problem of the caste system in India, underlying that the lives of individuals categorized as "subaltern groups" (in Spivak's term) are worthless. Ezekiel comments on this argument of Naipaul as we can see in the following quote:

So, in Naipaul's India, "the clerk will not bring you a glass of water even if you faint." In my India, a clerk will do virtually anything for you if he is treated humanely. I know these clerks, their background, their problems, their conditions of work, their income, how they are transported to and from their places of work, their educational and cultural limitations, their sense of dignity and worth, their humanity, in short. Mr. Naipaul is both right and wrong about them as he is on many other points in his book. I admit that for Indian readers the core of rightness in his complaint out to be taken seriously. It is more valuable than his reckless generalization, his grotesque exaggeration, his nagging, irritable manner. On the other hand, why should he be allowed to get away with all that? (Ezekiel, 1976, p.196)

Ezekiel's argument is that if Indian clerks are treated humanely there is no reason for them to behave other people inhumanely. Therefore, it is clear that Ezekiel shares Naipaul's concern. However, he disapproves of Naipaul's lack of the necessary background information about the Indian clerks. Ezekiel deduces that Naipaul is partly right about the matter, however; he still finds his limited point of view "pathetic" (Ezekiel 196). This limitation thus creates an "unfortunate" situation for both Naipaul and India according to Ezekiel (Ezekiel, 1976, p.196).

Ezekiel also discusses another character of Naipaul, Malik, an engineer who is unable to find a superior job in India. In the book, Malik tells Naipaul that he is not offered superior jobs because he does not have a car and this claim makes sense to Naipaul. Ezekiel conversely finds Malik's excuse not to have a

better job quite funny. He defends that owning a car should not be regarded more necessary than having related business experiences as a qualification for recruitment. The section of the story where Naipaul believes Malik and stands by him is not so reasonable and convincing for Ezekiel. He says “That in Mr. Naipaul’s India. In my India, engineers trained abroad, provided they have what it takes, advance rapidly, buy a car before they can afford it because advancement is certain, land superior jobs even if they don’t have a car and are given one by the firm, with an allowance for maintenance” (Ezekiel, 1976, p.199). According to Ezekiel, the actual reason why Malik cannot get a better job is because his personal characteristics and professional skills do not measure up to his qualifications.

In order to clarify his argument, Ezekiel narrates another story that he has experienced before.

It is my turn now to tell a story, a true one which does not cast any dark reflections on much-maligned India. The overtones are purely human. We were five executives in a business firm. One of us never succeeded in getting a woman to go out with him. We teased him about it. “A modern Indian woman,” he said, “will not go out with a man unless he has a car.” We laughed heartily. None of us had a car at that time – and we had no problems in that delicate area where our colleague was unsuccessful. He was merely unattractive to women, and still is, seven years later. He has had a car for a long time. But he is always alone in it. (Ezekiel, 1976, p.199)

Through his own amusing story, Ezekiel attempts to utter that people may make excuses to evade confronting the real reasons for their failures. It might be tough for them to accept and stand behind their faults or disadvantages. He additionally claims that Malik might be one of these people (assuming Naipaul has actually met him). Readers may accordingly agree with Ezekiel that Malik and other extreme or humorous characters might be nothing but the construct of Naipaul’s narrative. Even if these characters are not completely fictitious, Naipaul might have purposely portrayed them differently in a way to serve his purpose of making his book more appealing to his readers. In other words, as Ezekiel asserts, Naipaul may have selectively perceived what he wanted to see, ignoring other perceptions or perspectives. “These stories enabled him to believe what he wanted to believe” (Ezekiel, 1976, p.198).

Ezekiel criticizes both Naipaul's method for discovering the truth and what Naipaul presents as the truth.

(...) I am not in fact doubting his veracity, only his approach towards the discovery of the truth. He makes the truth about India seem simple. I don’t believe it is simple. Honestly and frankly, he exposes his state of mind. I cannot believe that in such state of mind, truth can be discovered. The truth about Mr. Naipaul, certainly, but not the whole truth about India. (Ezekiel, 1976, p.195)

It is not possible to discover the truth about India through such a manner according to Ezekiel. What Naipaul concludes at the end of each story or memory is only his individual matter. That is why, Ezekiel finds his inferences insufficient to introduce India.

Regarding the matter of authenticity in *An Area of Darkness*, K. Masih, who responds harshly to Naipaul’s representation of India, shares the same opinion with Ezekiel. Masih states, “My first response on reading V. S. Naipaul’s *An Area of Darkness* was that here was a gifted writer with the dexterity of a magician to forge fact and fiction together” (Masih, 1988, p.142). Calling Naipaul a “magician,” who combines “fact and fiction together,” Masih claims that the memories written by Naipaul in his travelogue are not completely true. For instance, In *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul blames Indians for being submissive to the external powers, underlying, “[n]o other country was more fitted to welcome a conqueror; no other conqueror was more welcome than the British” (Naipaul, 2002, p.280). He supports the idea that Indians do not rebel even though they are oppressed, assimilated and humiliated by another country, enouncing they are incapable of resisting and defending themselves. Furthermore, he

also believes that most Indians admire British culture because Englishness represents a “fantasy” and “an extra quality” for them (Naipaul, 2002, p.259). These assessments by Naipaul aggravate Masih, who attempts to disprove Naipaul’s argument by implicating that India have not broken down despite the British power for hundreds of years. Masih also indicates, “We have a tradition, a heritage to keep us going even the west has tried to annihilate us economically” (Masih, 1988, p.147). Naipaul’s criticism is “misplaced” and misleading according to both K. Masih and N. Sharada Iyer (Iyer, 2002, p.88).

Similarly, building on Masih’s critique, Sujit Bhosale protests both Naipaul’s narration and content. He not only highlights Naipaul’s failure in the representation of the whole country but also expresses his regrets caused by Naipaul’s sharp criticism.

Naipaul’s description of India is impulsive and anecdotal. His failure is evident in the overall gloomy picture that comes out of his writing. But again this is the beauty of a travelogue, as it captures the true responses of a visitor. The picture surely is not complete and lacks many facades of India. As an Indian, I feel really sad, as most of Naipaul’s analysis and criticism holds so true that I cannot deny it. What he saw in 1964 has seldom changed after almost fifty years. His sharp criticism of almost everything related to India offends and hurts me. But at the same time, it helps me to pause and look at myself and my country from a different perspective. I may not recommend this book to an outsider, as it does not capture the true essence of India. But Indians should definitely give it a read, as it might act as a catalyst in the process of change that we all desire as Indians. (<http://sbhosale.wordpress.com/page/2/>)

Similar to Ezekiel, Bhosale also does not deny the points that Naipaul is right. Nevertheless, he states that he would not want a foreigner to read Naipaul, as most of his arguments do not fully capture the true essence of Indian culture.

In his 2001 interview with Farrukh Dhondy for the *Literary Review*, Naipaul explains his intention behind writing *An Area of Darkness* and defends himself against the accusations of other writers, critics, and reviewers – especially Ezekiel’s.

I didn't know. I didn't think of it that way, *as an attack* on India [emphasis added]. I thought of it *as a record of my unhappiness* [emphasis added]. I wasn't knocking anybody, it was a great melancholy experience actually. Mark you, it's full of flaws: what it says about caste is influenced by ideas I had picked up here, British ideas. I think differently about caste now. I understand the clan feeling, the necessity of that in a big country. And the book was bad about Indian art. I should have understood that art depends on patrons, and that in Independent India, with the disappearance of Indian royal courts, the possibility for art had been narrowed - instead of thinking that this was rather terrible, that there was no art. It will nag at me now, it will nag at me for some years. (Naipaul, 2001)

Even though Naipaul accepts that he has failed to represent Indian art and his views on caste has changed, he does not accept any criticism regarding that his book is an attack on India. He supports his defense confessing that it is “a record of [his] unhappiness.” By using the term “my” unhappiness, he actually individualizes the matter in exactly the same way most critics argue such as Namatra Rathore Mahanta. In the book entitled *V.S. Naipaul: The Indian Trilogy*, Mahanta points out that “*An Area of Darkness* is full of Naipaul’s comments and reactions. The ‘I’ of the writer is predominant” (...) (Mahanta, 2004, p.124).

In the article entitled “Confronting Reality: A Study on Naipaul’s India: A Wounded Civilization,” Dr. Sneha Gupta analyzes the underlying reasons behind Naipaul’s unhappiness and his decision to turn towards India. To clarify this shift, she narrates Naipaul’s travel from England to India, underlining what has motivated and disillusioned him during his journey.

London just turned out to be Naipaul’s commercial center, making him materially comfortable but

did not provide him any spiritual pleasure. Rejecting London Naipaul turns to India, looking upon it as a haven where his tormented-self may have some kind of relief. As the grandson of a laborer of Dubeys and Tiwaris Brahmins of Uttar Pradesh, India lay around him in his infancy, in the things of the house, the colored pictures of Hindu deities, the string bed, the brass and sandalwood. Naipaul's colonized self had sought a recovery of self-esteem in the realm of fantasy by building on picture of India seen in the religious objects of his grandmother's pooja room and pictures of the blue Himalayas, lofty and unconquered. It existed to in the secret premises of family actions, in a preferred case of self-possession. (Gupta, 2014, pp.553-4)

Naipaul's visit to London does not provide him spiritual satisfaction this time while it only offers material comfort. Therefore, he despairingly seeks solace in India contenting himself with family rituals. His journey accordingly causes him to interpret his country from a different perspective. Gupta compares this revisionist view of Naipaul to revalue India to a colonizer's desire to rename a foreign land. This is, in Gupta's term, the process that Naipaul rediscovers his homeland of which he has dreamed since his childhood. He correlatively associates Naipaul's existing distance from his homeland with the long time he has spent imagining it. Nevertheless, this process of imagination enables Naipaul to establish an emotional connection with his homeland and this link transforms into a kind of initiation journey for him. As he searches for India, he further learns about himself. Therefore, both Dr. Sneh Gupta and William Walsh quoted by Gupta describe this as an "inward journey" during which Naipaul discovers more himself rather than about India.

Naipaul had grown up surrounded by momentos of India and this kept India alive in his mind even though only as a mysterious land of darkness from which his ancestors had arrived. Naipaul himself states that the India, which was the background to his childhood, was an area of the imagination. Naipaul's journey to India is an exploration of the self, it is an inward journey to the land mysteriously darker and farther away than Trinidad. William Walsh writes about Naipaul's journey to India; "Naipaul's returned to India is as much as a research into himself as into another country. He is crawling on sensitive naked feet through the tunnels of his own self." (Gupta, 2014, p.554)

In essence, Naipaul's journey to India is not merely a physical journey but also a complex and personal exploration of his own emotions, opinions, and identity. It also reveals the influences of his sense of self, his memories, and his imagination on his understanding of the self and his stance towards his homeland.

At the end of his inward journey, Naipaul, who is repressed by his Western self, cannot find what he has anticipated. "The India which Naipaul encounters is shockingly different from the India of his imagination, the India of his Trinidadian childhood, that 'are of the imagination' revealed through ceremonies, carried out in a language he did not understand" as Adina Paicu expresses (Paicu, 2014, p.133). He "learn[s his] separateness from India" (Naipaul, 2002, p.247) and, struggles, in every encounter, to overcome the shock of recognizing differences. That's why, according to Paicu, *An Area of Darkness* is "not only about India's inability to rise to the standards of the Western world, but also about the incapacity of the writer to pursue a childhood myth" (Paicu, 2014, p.133). The dissonance between the imagined India and the real India leads to Naipaul's profound disillusionment. At the end of his book, he reflects "It was a journey that ought not to have been made; it had broken my life in two" (Naipaul, 2002, p.356). In this context, the term "darkness" seems to signify to Naipaul's disillusionment as well. As a metaphor, "darkness" symbolizes both the India that Naipaul has idealized and mystified as an unknown and therefore dark place since his childhood, and the land where he feels disconnected due to his alienation and disappointment.

As an alienated individual, Naipaul perceives himself as a mere "visitor" (Naipaul, 2002, p. 186). India represents "a country of nonsense" to him, as he feels no sense of belonging there (Naipaul, 2002, p.87). Throughout his journey, he feels both mentally and psychologically disoriented. As he travels through

India, he confronts his sense of homelessness and emptiness (Naipaul, 2002, p.357). Naturally, Naipaul has never possessed a national identity unlike Ruskin Bond, who confidently states, "I am as Indian as the dust of plains or the grass of a mountain meadow" (Trivedi, 2012, p.4). Nor has he ever devoted himself to a nation, as Ezekiel does, when he declares "Confiscate my passport, Lord, / I don't want to go abroad. / Let me find my song / where I belong" (Lal, p.161). However, as Assistant Professor Ajay K. Chaubey interprets in "From Mutiny to Mutinies: A Post-colonial Study of Naipaul's Indian Trinity," Naipaul "neither rejects nor remains indifferent to [India]" (Chaubey, 2011, p.5). Professor Chaubey relates this dilemma to Naipaul's "love-hate relationship with India" (Chaubey, 2011, p.3). Professor Aloy Chand Biswas, in his article entitled "V.S. Naipaul's Response to India In *An Area of Darkness*," argues the underlying reasons for Naipaul's identity and adaptation problems. According to Biswas, Naipaul suffers from "a double exile."

His grandfather long ago had to leave India and went to Trinidad as indentured labourer. There he became settled within Indian communities and led a life in exile. By the time Naipaul visits India he can still well recollect his Trinidadian experiences. Again he had to go to London at the age of eighteen leaving their Trinidadian exile. In Trinidad the indentured labourers were exposed to cultural patterns imported from England. So when Naipaul came to England *the difference he felt was not in culture, but in his adaptation to it* [emphasis added]. For in Trinidad he was fostered in imported colonialism, but in England he is placed in the very home of colonialism. Therefore the first thing after coming to England he had to do was to learn to be blinded of his inheritance. His arrival in London makes him feeling a rootless. His chartered journey to London cut off his link with Hindu heritage. Now the real dilemma appears – his past collapsing before him and *the possibility of a new set of culture appearing a distant reality* [emphasis added]. It is first enigma of arrival in his life. A Caribbean by birth, an Indian by heritage, a down-right colonial by culture, Naipaul, when visits India in search of his resting place, it is very natural India appears to him a void, a featureless area of darkness. But the darkness Naipaul sees in India is not the darkness in India itself. It is the darkness having frozen in Naipaul since the days of his Trinidad life. (Biswas, 2012, p.99)

Biswas asserts that Naipaul's double exile causes him to feel homeless and rootless. He feels stuck between his past and present, England and India. He associates Naipaul's alienation and sense of darkness with his unmet expectations and personal conflicts. To advocate his argument, Biswas quotes N. Sharada Iyer who notes that "Naipaul's writings dealt with the cultural confusion of the Third World and the problem of an outsider, a feature of his own experience as an Indian in the West Indies, a West Indian in England and a nomadic intellectual in a post-colonial world" (Biswas, 2012, p.99). In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Naipaul says, "I was surrounded by areas of darkneses," probably referring to the same existential dilemma (Naipaul, 2001).

The critics discussed above reach a consensus on two key points concerning Naipaul's attitude towards India. Firstly, they characterize his perspective as narrow, rigid, prejudiced, and racist. Secondly, they associate this mindset with his identity conflict and personal dissatisfaction. His exilic or double conscious is frequently cited as a factor contributing to his isolation from India. Even though he "has every reason to go back to his roots" (Bakari, 2003, p.248), he maintains a distance from his homeland. Nevertheless, it remains uncertain whether the journey that inspired him to write *An Area of Darkness* "was a journey that had broken [his] life in two" [emphasis added]" (Naipaul, 2002, p.356), or the journey itself served as a mechanism for him to construct double identities and conceal himself behind them.

Stuart Hall's theory on "cultural identity" may provide a broader insight into the challenges Naipaul encounters in constructing individual and national identity due to his multilayered identity, being inherently Caribbean, rooted in India, and culturally English. Therefore, a more thorough analysis of Naipaul's intercultural in-betweenness, as identified by the critics addressed throughout the article, can



be conducted. According to Hall, identities are formed and shaped by the ways in which individuals are positioned within their historical contexts and by their interactions with the narratives that define those contexts. These identities are not static but are continuously influenced by the interplay of historical, cultural, and power-related factors (Hall, 1990, p.225). Cultural identity, in this sense, is not simply a matter of “being” but also of “becoming.” Consequently, even though they have roots in a particular place and time, they evolve over time (Hall, 1990, p.225). Naipaul, who possesses a diasporic identity, has a relationship with his cultural roots that is characterized by a duality of sentiments. On the one hand, he evinces an attraction to his cultural heritage. On the other hand, he experiences a sense of alienation from those very roots. Considering Hall’s assertion that cultural identity “is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth,” it can be inferred that individuals play a significant role in the “politics of identity” (Hall, 1990, p.226). An individual facing the challenges of multilayered identity, especially one like Naipaul, whose works are analyzed in the context of travel literature, makes a valuable contribution to both travel writing and the social sciences, including literature, history, politics, and psychology, all of which have interdisciplinary links to this field.

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