



## INDIA THROUGH THE EYES OF NAIPAUL IN INDIA: A WOUNDED CIVILIZATION

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### Abstract

*This paper studies the nation through an expatriate's perspective. V.S. Naipaul's point of view helps to broaden the framework within which India is defined. To understand this concept better, it is necessary, to begin with, Naipaul's Indianness (Paicu). His famous travelogue India: A Wounded Civilization has been selected here to examine his point of view for the country of his forefathers. As we all know that Naipaul is a non-resident Indian writer who has explored the sense of exile and displacement. This work will portray the complex relations with the land of his ancestors. His keen desire was that India should understand its past and progress towards its future. Rather than feeling regret for the past, its better nation should move forward to build a glorious future. The conclusion will round up Naipaul's perspective towards India.*



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## INTRODUCTION

The book *India: A Wounded Civilization* is a candid account of Naipaul's feelings that a vast, agonized and the mysterious country has aroused in him. In this novel wound and pain of the author through the characters have been explored and interpreted, and exposed in different locations and scenarios. However, this pain does not confine only to physical wound and loss but also go beyond.

Colonization, globalization, and mimicry have destroyed, disfigured, and distorted the Indianness of India (Ashcroft et al.). They have bred wound and loss of millions of Indians. As Frantz Fanon agrees that colonization holds the natives in its grip, empties their brain, disfigures and destroys them. Fanon assumes that identity is a desire that human beings have constructed for recognition, association, and protection which have been lost.

Three decades of India's independence were over but India is still languishing by

many centuries of foreign rule. She hasn't yet found her ideology of regeneration. Naipaul believes that India is still languishing. She is passing with illiteracy, backwardness, and poverty (Chakrabarti). The western imported technology is not geo-based, so it does not match with the needs of the majority of Indians, India has failed to produce human resource with the highest skills and clearest vision. The novel narrates that India's intellect is wounded. It is of the second rate and all progress is mere imitation and mimicry of the west. Naipaul writes

All the disciplines and skills that India seeks to exercise are borrowed. Even the ideas, Indians have the achievement of their civilization are essentially ideas given to them by European scholars, in the nineteenth century, India by itself could not have rediscovered or assessed its past. (Naipaul)

India remained fully dependent upon the west and it borrowed alien academic discipline to understand its past. The centuries of British rule of India harmed its culture, economic development, and civilization. India is still crippling without its own specific identity. She is not to be judged but is only to be experienced. Also, western technical hegemony is another cause for which India is suffering. The intellectuals and the planners are more confused today than they were in the British rules. Naipaul retorts:

In their attempt to go beyond the old sentimental abstraction about the poverty of India, and to come to terms with the poor, Indians have to reach outside their civilization, and they are at the mercy than of every kind of imported ideas. The intellectual, confusion is greater now than at the time of the British Raj. (Naipaul)

The novel gets the background from the 1975 emergency when Naipaul had visited India the third time. He described in the novel vividly what he saw and observed which reinforced in him a thought that India wounded by many centuries of foreign rule and still not found an ideology of regeneration. Naipaul views the scenario thus:

Mimicry within mimicry, imperfectly understood idea: the second year girl student in the printing department not understanding the typographical exercise she had been set, playing with type like a child with a type writer avoiding in the name of design, anything like symmetry . . . there . . . there are times when the intellectual confusion of India seems complete and it seems impossible to get back to clarifying first principle (Naipaul). Colonial inferiority of Indians is another cause of India's confusion and directionless. The British presence in

India from the early seventh century to the mid-twenties caused a serious loss in the arena of culture, language, religious politics, and geography of the nation. In the beginning, the British entered India as merchants of East India Company in the first decade of the seventh century. The company, having its promoters from London had to make much effort and struggle to establish its monopoly right of trade in India because Indian opposed British presence in India. Dale H. Hoiborg explains:

The English venture in India was entrusted to the East India Company which received its monopoly rights in 1600. The company included group of London merchants attracted by Eastern prospects, not comparable to the national characters of the Dutch company (Hoiberg). In course of time, the British merchants in India intervened in the politics of the government of India for faster promotion of their trade though Indians refused any political intervention by the outsiders. They employed the strategic imperial policy to accomplish the faster promotion of their trade to achieve this, the British merchants tempted the local Indians and slowly and gradually lifted to the further steps with the support of the local powers. Hoiberg states the British's strategic entrance to Indian politics as:

At first the British were only one group of foreign readers among several, fortunate, to find in the Mughals, a firm government ready to foster trade. Their entry into politics was gradual, first as allies of country powers than as their virtual directors and only finally as master. At each step they were assisted by local powers who preferred British influence to that of their neighbors. (Hoiberg)

When the British oppression was in extreme, a military war broke between the British troop and the Indian troops in the southern part of India. In 1757, a military force led by Robert Clive defeated the forces of the Nawab of Bengal and Introduced British Empire to India. Kumar assumes, "The situation became so serious that the British government was compelled to send a contingent of Gorkha soldiers to suppress the rebels"(Kumar). This victory of the Gorkha Battalion over the southern Indian troops transformed the East India Company from the association of traders to the rules. They directly began to exercise political sovereignty over a large land and people of India making a colonial

post. Tuhiwai Linda Smith states, "Colonialism became imperialism's outpost, the fort and port of imperial outreach" (Smith). The nation then went in the hand of the outsiders. It was the beginning of the loss of political sovereignty of the Indians in India. Indians for the first time experienced the colonial governance ruled by the outsiders in their homeland.

India is in constant trauma of one kind or the other. This trauma doesn't give Indians any time to pause and think objectively. The novel could be seen as a critique of the blindness of Indians to the real world who prefer to judge themselves and others through the myopic glass of perceived high culture of centuries of rich civilization. Sashi Tharoor portrays the situation thus:

[. . .] large dry full of ragged humans eking but a living from land which had too many pitiful scratching on its unyielding surface. There was starvation in Motihari not just the land did not produce for its tillers to eat but because it could not, under the colonialist laws, be entirely devoted to keeping them alive. Three tenth of every man's land had to be consecrated to Indigo, since the British needed cash crops more than they needed wheat. (Tharoor)

India's confusion and directionless is seen not only in India's feeling but also in India's way of working. India is supposed to drift a pace with the progress of science and technology and hew out all the outdated traditional thoughts, feelings, culture, and traditions. The caste system still prevails in India. Untouchables are still assumed an obstacle in the way of India's development. Child marriage and puberty marriage is still in practice in some communities (Arif and Fatima). The hierarchy between low caste and high caste, rich and poor have become major issues of modern India. Crime, juvenile delinquency, unrest among youths, and suffering of the aged are the real issues of today in industrialized India. Also, law and order of the country are mocked every part. Polygamy and polyandry system practiced in Toda, Kota, and the Nair community has shadowed the heightened image of India.

The *Sati* system prevalent in the Hindu community as the glory of Hindusim or *Talaq* system practiced in Muslim community is outdated, old-fashioned, awkward, and primitive. This has further wounded India's civilization. C.N. Shankar Rao expresses:

The *Sati* system made the wife to be not only attached to the husband as long as he lived, but even after his death, because a *Sati* could never conceive of a second marriage or a second husband. Hence, on the death of the husband, the

wife had either to live chastely renouncing all the joys of life or to follow her husband by jumping into the funeral pyre . . . a Muslim can divorce his wife as per the Muslim law without the intervention of the court. In *Talaq*, the husband has the right to dismiss his wife by repeating the dismissal formula thrice, the *Talaq* may be affected either orally or by making some pronouncement or writing by presenting *talaqnama*. (Khanal)

Thus, the Indian civilization passes with a number of losses, un-decidability, and confusion. The *Sati* and *Talaq* system practiced among Hindu and Muslim communities have lowered down the pure and mounted image of India. The riots between the Muslims and Hindus, Hindus and Christians, for the sake of religious identity, rituals and norms have pushed the sacred crown of India into chaos. The notion of secularism has been threatened by many in secular elements. Naipaul's novel reveals widespread wounds and the pain people have in post-independent India. He was not an outsider who ignore the weaknesses of India instead of that he feels his duty was to improve the land of his forefathers. He was startled to see the downfall of India where people were not able to cope up with their problems. He realized that he could never be only a tourist visiting India for its beautiful Himalayas or rivers. He accepts: "India is for me a difficult country. It is not my home, and yet I cannot reject it to or be indifferent to it, I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far." (Naipaul)

His curious love-hate kind of relationship with his ancestor's country could not allow him to close his eyes to the weaknesses. It was his love for the nation which came out as anger and distress. His grandfather shifted from India but India could never have shifted from Naipaul's mind. He exposes his bitter experience after his years' journey to different parts of India. He doesn't hesitate to comment on the chaos and confusion of the flight to which he was a traveller. Notwithstanding, India remained an illusion for him. He felt that he was homeless without the past, without ancestors.

## CONCLUSION

Naipaul has exposed the reality which is chaotic and without the sense of historical continuity. He dissects the Indian psyche and pinpoints the muddy thinking and mythologizing that is widely prevalent in the intellectual life of India.(Iyengar)

In the development of progressive India, the caste system is a great obstacle. The cruel division of labor on the ground of the caste has created the greatest hierarchy among the people of this great country. He concludes that India is a wounded civilization, defunct, dead,

or sick. India was defeated by her weaknesses that have been ignored for centuries. His diagnosis can be noticed in his travelogue.

No doubt the British exploited the country in all forms but Indians have to unite and move forward. Rather than repenting of the past, it's better to concentrate on the progress and build a glorious present.

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