

PROJECTION OF WOMEN IN NAIPAUL'S INDIAN TRAVELOGUES

Ankita Chaudhary¹ & Gaurav Sharma²

¹Assistant Professor, School of Humanities, Abhilashi University, Mandi, H.P.(India)

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, T.R. Abhilashi Engineering College, Mandi, H.P.(India)

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Abstract

This paper seeks to represent the Indian women in V.S. Naipaul's Indian travelogues – An Area of Darkness, India: A Wounded Civilization, and India: A Million Mutinies Now. Naipaul's three books on India are not only a discourse of a diasporic individual who returns to his ancestral land to re-establish the severed ties with the homeland, but it is also a cultural, social, political, and economic representation of India towards the end of the nineteenth century. While portraying the lives of Indians in these three books, Naipaul has also portrayed how Indian women cope with the changing society. Through years of discrimination and subjugation holding them back, Indian women gradually stand up against the patriarchal society, and Naipaul's on his three books on India record how these women cope with the changing societal norms.

Keywords: identity, mimicry, poverty, education, working women, dowry, prejudice, marriage



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Introduction

A lot of books and criticisms have been written on Naipaul's travelogues and more so, on the Indian travelogues. Naipaul has encapsulated his multifarious experiences in India in three books - *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, and *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. In these three books, Naipaul gives his candid opinion about Indian society, economy, politics, art, and architecture in vivid detail and his keen vision misses nothing. Naipaul's representation of women in these three books brings out how Naipaul sees Indian women and records the potential Indian women. It also shows the changing lives of these women through the decades.

In the year 1962 Naipaul visited India along with his first wife, Patricia Hale and she

was present with him throughout the journey. But, surprisingly, Naipaul does not acknowledge her presence anywhere in his book *An Area of Darkness* except in the introductory chapter titled “A Traveller’s Prelude: A Little Paperwork”, where she is referred to as a “companion”. The little episode where she finds herself mentioned as the companion of Naipaul concentrates more on the callous attitude of the government officials in India. Naipaul had to run from one government office to another to retrieve the alcohol bottles that were seized from him, upon his entry to the country. He was accompanied by his wife. While Naipaul was trying to complete the paperwork so that he could get back his bottles, Patricia fainted due to excessive heat and exhaustion. A lady clerk, whom Naipaul addresses as Miss Desai, was present there; but to Naipaul’s dismay, she was hardly moved by the mishap. She merely pointed out to a dirty glass on a shelf. Other lady clerks could be heard giggling and all these had a very negative impression on Naipaul. Naipaul was irked and deeply frustrated with what he thought to be the callous and incompetent attitude of Indian government officials.

In his first book on India- *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul does not portray many women. A few women find mentioned in the book. His interaction with them is mostly restricted and he talks to only a select few women. Some women like his grandmother and Gold Teeth Nanee find mentioned because they represent Naipaul’s early memories of Indians in Trinidad.

Gold Teeth Nanee and her husband had come from India. She was Naipaul’s grandmother’s friend. They refused to speak English and spoke only in Hindi. This was done to emphasize their Indian connection. But Naipaul speaks of her as a greedy and jealous woman. Since she was childless, she desired to exercise the authority that Naipaul’s grandmother had over the children. Naipaul sarcastically remarks in *An Area of Darkness* that “...in matters of food she was, unusually for an Indian, experimental and pertinacious”. (22)

In Bombay Naipaul sees the pathetic condition of women beggars and slum dwellers. The abject condition of prostitutes is also mentioned. In the three brothels that he sees in Bombay, he throws light on the degraded lives of the prostitutes. The girls lived in unhygienic conditions. The brothels were so dirty that one would not even wish to enter there. The dirty, old, and shriveled women were expressionless and it only heightened his sense of despair, hopelessness, and helplessness. Naipaul suggests that it was perhaps ironical because they considered themselves lucky, as they were employed. Naipaul calls it “...a frightening glimpse of India’s ever receding degrees of degradation” (Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness*, 44).

The only Indian woman about whom Naipaul talks in detail are Mrs. Mahindra. Naipaul meets Mrs. Mahindra in Delhi. He was a paying guest in her house for some time. Mrs.

Mahindra's husband was a contractor and was usually out on business and this left Mrs. Mahindra with a lot of time. Mrs. Mahindra was very excited to meet Naipaul and his wife (Naipaul does not tell that he is with his wife). Mrs. Mahindra was crazy about foreign things and tried to impress her foreign guests. Her disregard for Indians and Indian merchandise is evident from her attitude to her servants, her craze for all things foreign, and her dislike of Indian manufactured products sold in the market. She also wanted her son to marry a foreigner. Coming from a simple background, she loved to display her wealth and tried to impress her guests with the interior decoration of her house which was modeled on occidental design.

Mrs. Mahindra belonged to that class of women who had come upon a lot of money but did not know how to spend it. Her lack of education and fine sensibility made her a snob who lived a secure life and was not only unaware but also not bothered about the social and economic conditions of the country. She found solace in shopping in costly bazaars and loved displaying her wealth and rich taste in her choice of things, to her friends. To keep up with the image of high society, she tried to impress Naipaul by speaking in broken English. Harish Trivedi in his article points out how this situation had disappointed Naipaul. He says:

But when Naipaul left his little culturally arid desert island of Trinidad and finally came to the Mother Country, which for him ultimately is not England but India, and found that the "Bunty's" and the "craze-for-foreign" housewives in cities like Delhi and Bombay are no less dazzled and glamorized by the superficial attractions of the west, his disillusionment was deeper because he had expected a more resolute resistance to the West from India, with its ancient civilization as well as its recent history of spectacular effective nationalist opposition to British rule. (30)

The next woman that Naipaul writes about is the American traveler named Laraine, whom he meets during his stay in Kashmir. But his very first interaction with her, makes Naipaul realize that he was too critical and harsh about India. The many things in India that he had found fault with were his impatience and exaggeration. Laraine came to the country because she was attracted to Hindu philosophy. Unlike Naipaul, she was enjoying her time in the country. While Naipaul could see nothing beyond dirt and squalor, Laraine could dream of endless possibilities. Her affair with Rafiq and her conversion to Islam only proves that she had come with an open heart and was seeking a more meaningful life from her journey to India. But Naipaul believes that India managed to disillusion her. Her marriage to Rafiq lasts for a short time and she escapes to a Hindu ashram. After that, she left India and Naipaul could not establish any contact with her.

His first journey across the country ends with his visit to his ancestral village in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Here Naipaul meets Jussodra. Jussodra knew Naipaul's grandfather and had been to Trinidad. She tells Naipaul about his grandfather and his journey to Trinidad. Perhaps the little English that Jussodra knew confirmed this point because Naipaul says that the way the old woman told the story sounded like a fairy tale. All the while she was weeping. Naipaul could not relate to her and did not know what to do with her. With the approval from the IAS officer, he thought it was appropriate to give her some money. A few old photographs and postcards from Trinidad, which she presented before Naipaul, only added to his distress because he did not want to be associated with her or any of his ancestors.

The women in the book have no opinion, no voice, are helpless and callous, and are shown to live hollow life. The poor women are in a hopeless condition and the rich live a borrowed existence, seeing in themselves the foreigners and trying to live like them.

In the first book, the representation of women characters can also be seen as the representation of India in Naipaul's eyes. Gold Teeth Nanee, who was a part of his childhood memory, was a representation of what he expected of Indians and Indian attitudes. The greediness and jealousy and desire for authority in Gold Teeth Nanee are how Naipaul associates his impressions about India. This already is a representation of Naipaul's misunderstanding and incorrect assessment of Indians and also a case of extreme generalization. And this kind of impression that he had about Indians made his view about Indians and India prejudiced and incorrect.

The ladies in the government office were callous and uncooperative. Naipaul associates this flaw in a few women officers with all the government institutes and opines that they are incompetent and corrupt. The brothels and the beggars that he sees in Bombay give him the impression that perhaps everyone in India had a degraded and dismal existence. Mrs. Mahindra represents how Indian society functions on mimicry and that even after Independence, Indians still preferred the colonial lifestyle and had not been able to move away from it. From the story of Laraine, it seems that Naipaul wants to stress the idea of the ultimate disillusionment of a great civilization and the realization of the fact that India no longer can provide a great cultural and traditional background. In Jussodra, Naipaul sees his frustration in finding out his roots. His refusal to identify with the poverty-stricken village and the degraded condition of the country makes him further frustrated and he leaves India with a promise to never return to the country again.

But Naipaul's quest for an Indian identity makes his return several times. And no matter

how much he tries, he cannot sever the ties that connect him with the country. The second book, *India: A Wounded Civilization* is about the country during the Emergency and Naipaul, through this book brings out the changes and the tremendous impact that the Emergency had on people during this time. In this book too Naipaul does not present many women. But a thorough reading will show the changes that have come to women and their lives since his first travel.

The country has a woman Prime Minister. Naipaul keeps referring to her dictatorial form of government and highlights a few of her political programs and decisions. In the preface of *India: A Wounded Civilization*, Naipaul speaks against her decision to declare a state of Emergency in the country. He finds it useless. He says, “In 1975 Mrs. Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, for no good reason suspended the constitution of her country and declared a state of emergency” (Naipaul v). He also does not approve of her removal of poverty programs as Naipaul feels that these methods were useless because, in a large country like India, removal of poverty was not an easy thing to do. In *India: A Wounded Civilization*, Naipaul says, “It was Mrs. Gandhi, in 1971, who had made poverty a political issue. Her slogan in the election that year had been *Garibi Hatao*, Remove Poverty” (38). But apart from this Naipaul refrains from commenting about the impact of a powerful woman on the social front. Naipaul does not say whether she inspired other women to move out from the four walls of their houses.

Perhaps having a woman Prime Minister did not do much to elevate the social conditions of women in rural areas. Women, in rural areas still chose to remain veiled and they withdrew when any important discussion started. Women calculated their success and prosperity by the number of children they had. Their achievement was greater if the children were boys. The women in the rural areas remained backward and did not voice their opinion. Naipaul is also distressed to discover that the practice of selling wives to repay debts was prevalent in many rural areas.

When Naipaul goes to a village in the Bombay- Poona region, he is taken to the house of Mr. Patel, who is the richest and the most influential land owner of the village. Mr. Patel introduces Naipaul to his daughter-in-law. But it was not an introduction, in the real sense of the term. Naipaul was invited to take a look at the house. While touring the house, Naipaul is taken to the kitchen and where the daughter-in-law was working. She politely greeted him. The villagers informed Naipaul that she was a graduate. Though the admirers of the land owner boast of her academic achievement, Naipaul remarks: “Though lost and modest in the gloom of the kitchen, stooping over the fire and the smoke, she was a graduate!” (Naipaul,

“Wounded” 71).

Her academic achievement did not help her secure a job, or take part in any other important discussion about the village. She had no opinion of her own and even if she did, she had no scope or opportunity of displaying or utilizing it. So, her degree was only an instrument of a show-off for the family she was married into. She only was used to displaying the progressive mentality of the Patels because they had a daughter-in-law who was college educated. But Naipaul feels that her education served her no use because her life was restricted in the smoke and gloom of the kitchen.

While the women in the rural areas lacked the opportunity or the ability to voice their opinion, those who could do so had misplaced concerns. At a party in Delhi, Naipaul meets a foreign academic and his wife. The lady was well-connected. Her opinion regarding the poor of Bombay was severely criticized by Naipaul. She found the poor people in Bombay beautiful. Naipaul vehemently opposes her views by stating that nothing was beautiful about poverty. He felt that she was unnecessarily turning a raw reality about India into a romantic fantasy. But Naipaul who had witnessed people sleeping on the pavements, the little undernourished children who were almost begging for their rights to existence, and many more such deranged scenes could not associate such romantic notions with the poverty of the country. For him, poverty in the country was a serious issue that had to be addressed, with urgency and concern.

In the chapter “Synthesis and Mimicry”, in *India: A Wounded Civilization*, Naipaul tries to present how all the institutes of the country were functioning on borrowed ideas. He takes the example of the Indian Legal System and its procedures to prove his point. The Legal system can provide no justice and is modeled on foreign principles. But at the same time, it recognizes the age-old Indian societal and religious norms which result in flawed justice being meted out to the victims of injustice. A cloth seller’s daughter committed suicide because she was mentally tormented by her in-laws and her husband. The girl could not fight back or revolt against the injustice meted out to her and chose to kill herself as the means to end her woe. But the rules of the law were so twisted that the husband is acquitted. Naipaul sees in it the failure of the Legal System because justice was denied to the poor girl and her family. Naipaul says:

Justice was done. But the injustice done to the dead girl was hardly commented on. The Supreme Court, hearing the appeal, spoke of ‘False ideas of family prestige’; but in Chari’s legalistic account, as rendered in *Blitz*, full of technicalities about the admissibility of evidence, the punishment of the cloth-sellers by the suicide of his daughter is made to appear just one of those things. ‘Oh yes,’ one of the appeal judges said, ‘you have to make arrangements so

thoroughly that you satisfy every demand made by any one of the bridegroom's party.' And in this acknowledgment of the traditional demands of family honor the tragedy of the girl is lost: writing letters to the family she is not allowed to see ('God's will be done), so quickly accepting that her young life is spoiled and has to be ended. (Naipaul, "Wounded" 121)

An article titled, "Changing Terms of Political Discourse: Women's Movement in India, the 1970s – 1900s" written by Indu Agnihotri and Vina Mazumdar, presents how violence against women was rampant in society during that period. The violence was perpetrated through the means of social and sometimes legal institutions and was defended in the name of the custom and tradition of the society. This led to an increase in the number of crimes against women, especially from her family, like dowry deaths. Sometimes these incidents were passed off as accidents and the law was twisted in a manner that overlooked the otherwise grave injustice done to the women. Many campaigns were therefore started to spread awareness and sensitize people against the domestic violence that young brides and girls encountered within the family. "The successive campaigns brought into focus the trauma women undergo within the confines of the ever-enduring family, glamorized by policymakers and elite groups in general, as 'the basic foundation of Indian society'".

Thus, through the incident of the cloth seller's daughter's plight, Naipaul presents not only the incompetence of legal and social institutions in terms of protecting the victims, but also portrays how women in India are subject to violence even in their homes and how these cruel incidents are overlooked by everyone and are allowed to exist in the country.

This book portrays that though women have received an education, they lack the ability to revolt against the established notions of class, caste, religion, family, etc, and continue a subdued and submissive existence. Even after almost 30 years of Independence and with an influential woman as the Prime Minister of the country, Indian women continued to remain backward and voiceless and to Naipaul, quick emancipation from the situation seemed distant and almost next to the impossible dream. Namrata Rathore Mahanta says in her book:

The portrayal of women in *An Area of Darkness* and in *India: A Wounded Civilization* is offhand and incidental. Women are shown to be a part of the decaying system. They are incapable of bringing about any major change in the world they inhabit. They are shown to have no understanding of the changing world around them. But with *India: A Million Mutinies Now* there comes a sharp change in Naipaul's perception. Women are portrayed against their socio-economic-political backgrounds and the change that has occurred through women is carefully brought out. (92)

Naipaul's third book on India, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* is different from his other two books because here Naipaul not only adopts a new method of inquiry but also focuses on how much the country has changed for the better. Farhad Bani Idris in her book says the following words about Naipaul's third book on India: "In it, his strategy is to encourage all the Indians he speaks with to express themselves as freely as possible; authorial comments are kept to a minimum; and his choice of Indians who tell their individual histories is seemingly a cross-section of modern Indian society, including women, perhaps of hitherto suppressed castes, and other minorities" (74). Here Naipaul is less critical of India and is focusing more on the steady progress that has come in the last few decades. He now envisions a bright future for the country. Keeping in tune with the all-around progress, Naipaul tries to show how the position of women has changed in the country and women's involvement in this process.

In the chapter "Bombay Theatre" in *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, Naipaul presents the life and struggle of urban middle-class women. This is represented through the few women he meets in Bombay. Mr. Raote's wife is a working woman. She balances her family and her work and her contribution to the welfare of her family is substantial. Mr. Raote's wife does not personally speak to Naipaul. Mr. Raote tells about her during his interview with Naipaul.

Mr. Raote's wife took the bold step of marrying without the approval of her family and her in-laws. In a society, where arranged marriage was the only approved norm, going for a love match and that too to a person of a different caste was indeed a bold step. Mr. Raote's wife was indeed courageous because she dared to go against the conventions of family and society and marry Mr. Raote. Thereafter she sacrificed her education and took up a job as a telephone operator to support her family. Her job not only made her financially independent but also helped Mr. Raote pursue his dream. But all was not well on the family front. There were tensions between her and her mother-in-law. Mr. Raote believes that it was because of their love marriage, that his mother could not go along with his wife. But Naipaul does not believe this. He says:

Whether arising out of a love marriage or an arranged marriage, it was the eternal conflict of Hindu family life, a ritualized aspect of the fate of women, like marriage itself or childbirth or widowhood. To be tormented by a mother-in-law was part of a young woman's testing, part, almost, of growing up. Somehow the young woman survived; and then one day she became a mother-in-law herself, and had her daughter-in-law to torment, to round off life, to balance pain and joy. (Naipaul, "Mutinies" 58)

Another woman whom Naipaul meets in Bombay is Mallika. This was an incidental

meeting because Naipaul went to her house to interview her husband. Her husband, Namdeo Dhasal was an Ambedkarite and was the founder of Dalit Panthers. Her husband was not present and this allowed Naipaul to interview her instead. Mallika was born to a Muslim father and a lower caste Hindu mother. Her father was a Communist. She knew Namdeo for a long time before her marriage. Hers was a schoolgirl romance. She was thrilled when during one meeting Namdeo addressed her as “comrade”. Thereafter she started liking him. When she found out that her literary sensibilities matched Namdeo's, she fell in love with them. But things started falling apart soon after her marriage. The Dalit panther Movement began to break up and this harmed their marriage. The breaking up of the movement frustrated Namdeo. Namdeo started abusing her. In her autobiography, *I Want to Destroy Myself* she talked openly about the abuse she suffered in her marriage. But it was because of their child that she continued to stay in an abused relationship. The Indian legal system favored the father in the custody of the child in case of a divorce. She also says that she still loves Namdeo and hence wanted to continue the marriage. Mahanta says, “Her conflict arises out of the clash between her clear perception of the failure of her marriage and her love for Namdeo” (96).

Kala's story presented in the chapter “Breaking Out” brings out how women have emerged out of the shackles and prejudices that curbed their dreams and personality to a life of independence and confidence. Kala presented a progressive story because she was a reflection of changing women's perception in the present world. Kala's story of progress is presented in contrast with her mother's and this way Naipaul makes the distinction clear. Kala's mother was married off at an early age and she had no say in the decision. Kala says that this marriage had a huge impact on her mother because she was academically very good and wanted to study further. But this dream never materialized because the poor woman had to slog for her new joint family. She was also mentally and physically abused. No one listened to her and her opinion did not matter. But Kala's mother had succeeded to impress her importance of education and financial independence on her. Kala was now an independent working woman who dared to live life on her terms. Naipaul describes her in these words: “She was of Tamil brahmin origins. She did the publicity for a big organization. She was in her twenties, and unmarried. She was diligent and methodical; she had a reputation as a worker. She was grave, self-possessed, educated” (Naipaul, “Mutinies” 200).

In south India Naipaul meets his friend Sugar. During a certain meeting with him, Naipaul learns how arranged marriage of girls meant a huge expenditure for the girl's family,

because of the dowry system. Naipaul says: “The topic of wedding expenses was in the news: for some time, the newspapers had been carrying reports from different parts of the country about Hindu brides being done to death by their husbands’ families – often by fire – for not bringing a sufficient dowry or valuable enough gifts” (Naipaul, “Mutinies” 276).

The dowry for a very long time was passed off as a tradition in Hindu families because it was an easy way of earning money. The boy’s family also looked upon dowry as compensation for all the money they had spent on the education of their son. This social evil only increased the plight of the women because they would witness their families struggling hard to fulfill the desires of the groom’s family, in hopes of securing a happy and successful married life for the girl. Also, women were tortured to keep fulfilling the never-ending demands of their in-laws. Besides dowry, the marriage itself was a huge expense for the girl’s family because the larger part of the expense was the responsibility of the girl’s family. The long list of expenditures that Sugar read out for the benefit of Naipaul, gave a glimpse of the huge expenditure that was common in an Indian wedding.

Sugar later informs Naipaul that this was the reason why many middle-class Brahmin women chose to stay unmarried and took up jobs instead. Marriages in India had been turned into a lucrative business. In the article written by Indu Agnihotri and Vina Mazumdar, this incident finds a place. It not only highlights the increase in dowry-related torture in the country, but also shows how the police, government, and law and order dealt with such cases with a laid-back attitude. According to Agnihotri and Mazumdar:

By 1982 organizations in Delhi and elsewhere built up formidable evidence of dowry-related murder being passed off as ‘suicide’ or accidents [Kishwar and Vanita 1984; Kumar 1992]. In several cases, activists had themselves recorded the dying declaration of victims and urged the courts to treat this as evidence. Newspaper headlines screamingly reminded readers that ‘dowry deaths’ were on the increase. But the government, the police, and other official agencies along with society at large slumbered in insensitivity and the convenient middle-class play was used to dismiss the torture of a young bride as an ‘internal family matter’. It was a consistent, widespread mass campaign both individually by organizations and jointly under the aegis of the Dahej Virodhi Chetna Manch (DVCM) that finally mounted pressure on the government to act, if only out of political expediency. (1871)

Thus from the above article, we see how serious the matter was. Naipaul does not comment on the incompetency of the law and order of the country to deal with such cases urgently and seriously. His presentation of the issue throws light on another aspect of this case.

That is awareness among the young educated girls about the issue and their attitude toward handling it. The young girls during that era are represented by Kala. They have education and job and are choosing to lead an independent life focussing on their career. Though they are not yet strong enough to uproot the age-old tradition completely yet they have achieved the strength to stand on their own feet and found an alternate solution to the problem. The rejection of marriage by middle-class women was just an example of how women were coming out of the social, cultural, and traditional norms. For women in India, making themselves empowered enough to make a political opinion and take part in active politics was like a dream. Leslie J. Calman, in her article, points out how women were deprived of such a possibility. She says: In India, the goal of empowerment is particularly critical for women, who have been deprived of power within the family by mainstream religion and social traditions. Women cannot hope to exercise public power so long as they are powerless over their own lives because of forced subservience to fathers, husbands, and in-laws; violence within the family; and limited educational opportunity. Nor can they exercise power over their own lives or public life, if they are consumed with poverty, ill-health, and a lack of adequate food and clean drinking water. (Calman)

When Naipaul wrote *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, politics was still a man-dominated arena, yet Naipaul focuses on a few women who were involved in politics. Women like Periyar's second wife, Mrs. Veeramani, and others were involved in politics. Though this was possible because of the support and encouragement of men, this involvement instilled confidence in the minds of many young women, for they could draw inspiration from these women's political leaders. Naipaul, by recording the stories of these women in his travelogues further contributes to this movement. Periyar's second wife took upon the leadership of the Self-Respect campaign for five years after the death of her husband. Similarly, Mrs. Veeramani too was dedicated to the Self-Respect Cause. Parveen's direct involvement with politics is another such example. Naipaul says, "...Parveen had begun to make her mark politically, and a little time before she had led a delegation of Muslim women to the prime minister" (Naipaul, "Mutinies" 423). Parveen is an example of a young and confident Indian woman who desired to make her place in the field of politics. In Calcutta Naipaul meets Dipanjan who was once actively involved in the Naxalite movement. His wife Arati was a school teacher and she had her views regarding the Naxalite movement which she openly shares with Naipaul. This kind of direct and indirect participation of women in politics was carefully and diligently portrayed by Naipaul in his book.

Finally, Naipaul devotes one full chapter to women's magazines and its implication for urban women. Suman Gupta says in his book that the interview he conducts with the editor and magazines, "allow Naipaul to dwell on the situation of Indian women" (Gupta). He compares the different magazines available in the market. He finds out that *Woman's Era* was the most popular magazine. Initially, Naipaul is critical of the magazine. He does not find it attractive. He found the articles to be drab and boring and also thought that their subject matter was too commonplace to be discussed in a magazine. But irrespective of what Naipaul said or thought about it, *Woman's Era* continued to be the best-selling magazine in the country.

A talk with its editor and a comparison with the other magazines, make it clear why this magazine was the most sought after. The magazine targeted readers, especially women, from different classes and backgrounds. The language used was very simple English, which could be easily followed even by those ladies who did not have English background. The articles which dealt with topics on bride-seeing, personal hygiene, etc (about which Naipaul complains) were something that the women readers could relate to. The short stories in the magazine were simple; almost fantastic and always presented women in a good light. Naipaul finds out that *Woman's Era* was widely read by women because it acknowledged women's backgrounds. While other magazines like *Eve's Weekly* looked down upon the tradition of bride-seeing, the editor of *Woman's Era*, Vishwa Nath says that such a possibility was not an option for many young girls across the country. *Woman's Era* acknowledged the social and economic background of middle-class women and provided a solution to its readers. It never intimidated its readers. Magazines like *Femina*, *Savvy*, etc were for women of an elite class. They were inspired by foreign magazines and hence could be appreciated by only high-class women who had such exposure. But *Woman's Era* catered to the urban middle-class working women and sought to understand their lives and provide an easy solution to the difficulties they faced daily. Thus, it was the most popular among all women's magazines. Naipaul says:

That was the point: that for a girl or woman from that background, with the education, living in those 'surroundings', the idea of revolt was fantasy. *Woman's Era* was addressed to those women. And so the magazine which had at first appeared so characterless to me, so dull, began to say more, began to create a new whole new world of India, a whole section of urban Indian society that wouldn't have been easy for me to get to know. (Naipaul, "Mutinies" 474 - 475)

This review of magazines by Naipaul shows how education and awareness had touched

the lives of women across the country. In an article written by Mallikarjun Patil, he said that “The magazines like *Woman’s Era*, *Savvy* and *Femina* and their striking sale due to their cause of emancipation and empowerment of women, pacify the traveler about the nation”. (265). The reassurance, security, and recognition that *Woman’s Era* gave to its readers were one of the reasons behind its success. Naipaul says: “From time to time on my journey I bought an issue of *Woman’s Era*, and my regard for its journalistic and social achievement grew. I felt it deserved its success” (Naipaul, “Mutinies” 479-480).

Conclusion

The three books that Naipaul has written on India show his changing perception of the country. The emancipation of women from social evils and the subsequent empowerment of women is a very lengthy process. It can be achieved through awareness and education. But in India, this development has not taken too long. In the few years in which Naipaul travels across the country, he has presented the steady changes that have come in the lives of women.

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