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इतिहासाचार्य वि. का. राजवाडे संशोधन मंडळ, धुळे  
या संस्थेचे त्रैमासिक  
**॥ संशोधक ॥**

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ई-मेल : rajwademandaldhule1@gmail.com

rajwademandaldhule2@gmail.com

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३७	झाडीबोली भाषेतील समाजवैज्ञानिक दृष्टिकोन - १) प्रा.गायत्री गुरव, आरमोरी; २) डॉ.नरेंद्र आरेकर, कुरखेडा	१५७
३८	बहिणाबाई चौधरी यांच्या जीवन विषयक जाणवा - १) प्रा.जयश्री देशमुख, २) डॉ.देवयानी चव्हाण, नागपूर	१६१
३९	'स्वराज्य' तिब्बतियों का जन्मसिद्ध अधिकार - डॉ.जितेंद्र तागडे, कामटी, जि.नागपूर	१६५
४०	भारतातील रस्ते अपघात : एक चिकित्सक अभ्यास - १) डॉ.गणेश धोटे; २) डॉ.किशोर ठाकरे, लाखांदूर, जि.भंडारा.	१६८
४१	Bama's Karukku and Sangati : A Study of Autobiographical Narrative and Linguistic Revolt - Prof. Gajanan Tayade, Akot, Dist.Akola	१७२
४२	The Protagonist's Anxiety In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Mistress Of Spices - Prof. Ganesh Bele, Samudrapur, Dist.Wardha	१७७
४३	Challenges And Solution Of e-Commerce- A Review - Dr.Gayatri Chawale, Amrawati	१८१
४४	Role of Women in Panchayat Raj and Rural Development - Prof. Girish Atram, Kamptee, Dist.Nagpur	१८५
४५	Role of Women Entrepreneurship in the National Build in India - Prof. Nilesh Halami, Desaignanj, Dist.Gadchiroli	१८९
४६	Contribution of Entrepreneurship towards Women Empowerment - Dr.Harish Badwaik, Akola	१९५
४७	Exploring Feminist Perspectives in the Works of Alice Walker and Gloria Naylor in the Context of English Literature-Dr.Harshal Gajbhiya, Kamptee, Dist.Nagpur	१९९
४८	Naipaul's Travelogues on India: Seeking Roots and Belonging in Motherland - 1) Dr.Indal Jadhav; 2) Dr.Satyendra Gadpayle, Anjangaon Surji, Dist.Amrawati	२०३
४९	A Study of Growth in Digital Transactions in India - 1) Prof.Jayant Kalambe; 2) Dr.Punit Raut, Katol, Dist.Nagpur	२०६
५०	Needs to Revised India a New Sports Policy - Dr.Jayantkumar V. Ramteke, Kamptee, Dist.Nagpur	२११
५१	Theme Of Alienation And Cultural Displacement In The Novels Of Kiran Desai - Dr.Jayant Walke, Nagpur	२१५
५२	Alice's Adventures in Wonderland: A Fantastical Odyssey of Identity Formation and Critical Thinking in Children's Literature - 1) Dr.Jinsha Johnson,; 2) Dr. K. Sindhu, Salem, Tamilnadu	२१८
५३	A Critical Examination Of Gender Equality And Women's Rights In Securing Speedy Justice In India - Dr.Kailash K. Chafale, Gadchiroli	२२३
५४	Political History in Select Contemporary Indian English Novels - Dr.Kapil Singhel, Nagpur	२२८







# Naipaul's Travelogues on India: Seeking Roots and Belonging in Motherland

**Dr. Indal G. Jadhav**

Assistant Professor of English

Smt Radhabai Sarda Arts, Commerce & Science College, Anjangoan Surji, Dist. Amravati

e-mail: indaljadhav2011@gmail.com

**Dr Satyendra Gadpayale**

Professor of English

Smt Radhabai Sarda Arts, Commerce & Science College, Anjangoan Surji, Dist. Amravati

e-mail: satyendragadpayale777@gmail.com

## Abstract :

V.S. Naipaul, a master of travel writings and a Nobel Laureate, grew up and lived in a multiracial and multiethnic community but during all those years he felt him being a Hindu and cherished a secret fancy and curiosity about his ancestors' homeland, India. He was feeling a rootless man without a country. Often he felt alienated and struggling for his identity. It was this fascination and pain for his ancestors' homeland that brought him to India thrice i.e in 1962, 1975 and 1988 and wrote Trilogy an Area of Darkness, India: A Wounded Civilization and India: A Million Mutinies Now respectively. In this research paper, focus is made specifically on Naipaul's travelogues on India, as it offers a compelling narrative of his personal journey to discover his own roots and sense of belonging in a complex and diverse nation. By analyzing Naipaul's experiences, observations, and reflections in India, we uncover the multifaceted layers of his quest for his origin and connection to a place steeped in history and cultural diversity. Through a close examination of his encounters with people, places, and traditions, we shed light on the transformative impact of Naipaul's engagement with India and how it shapes his perception of identity and belongingness.

## Keywords :

roots, belongingness, alienation, ancestors, quest, fascination for motherland.

Naipaul's trilogy on India is his endless quest for identity and belongingness. Naipaul's forefathers were brought as indentured labourers by Britishers to a remote Caribbean Island in Atlantic Ocean in

1880; a strange and an unknown island which was many thousand miles away from their motherland. Though V S Naipaul was born and brought up in Trinidad, Indian atmosphere surrounded and haunted him every now and then through the variety of objects, rituals and people related to India. Naipaul put forth this scenario of Indian life and culture in following way :

To me as a child the India had produced so many of the persons things around me was featureless and I thought of the time when the transparenance was made as a period of darkness which also extended to the land, and darkness surrounds a hut at evening, thought for a little way around the hut there still light. The light was the area of my experience, in time and place. And I even now, thoughttime has widened, though space has contracted and I have travelled lucidly over that area which was to me the area of Darkness.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout his travelogues on India, Naipaul presents a unique and complex vision of India. His observations and reflections shed light on the multifaceted nature of Indian society, its historical legacies, and its potential future trajectory. Trinidad was a multiracial, multi religious and multicultural place. V S Naipaul was in constant combat and conflict with his own. At home, he was surrounded with Indian atmosphere but outside of his home, he would merge in multiethnic society in Trinidad. The feeling of loss of identity in non-Hindu country made him more panic and enigmatic. In his Nobel lecture, V S Naipaul describes this multicultural and multiethnic society:

Away from this world of my grandmother's





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**Dr. Indal G. Jadhav**

Assistant Professor of English

Smt Radhabai Sarda Arts, Commerce & Science College, Anjangoan Surji, Dist. Amravati

e-mail: indaljadhav2011@gmail.com

**Dr Satyendra Gadpayale**

Professor of English

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(२०३)





house, where we ate rice in the middle of the day and wheat in the evenings there was the great unknown- in this island of only 4 lakh people. There were the African or African-derived people who were the majority... There were the white people, not all of them English; and the Portuguese and the Chinese, at one time also immigrants like us. And more mysterious than these, were the people we called Spanish. 'Pagnols, mixed people of warm Brown complexions who came from the Spanish time, before the island was detached from Venezuela and the Spanish Empire, a kind of history absolutely beyond my child's comprehension.<sup>2</sup>

In this way, V S Naipaul was divided into two worlds-a world inside his home which was a staunch Hindu lifestyle and the world outside was a North Indian Brahminic whose forefathers were brought by Britishers from a small village near Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh. V S Naipaul's grandmother sang the songs of Sacred Ganga and holy city Benares. Such memories had left deep imprint on Naipaul's heart and mind. Naipaul expresses his dilemma of two worlds in his Nobel lecture :

So as a child I had this sense of two worlds, the world outside that tall corrugated-iron gate, and the world at home- or at any rate, the world of my grandmother's house. It was a remnant of our caste sense, the thing that excluded and shut out. In Trinidad, whereas new arrivals we were a disadvantaged community, that excluding idea was a kind of protection; it enabled us, for the time being and only for the time being to live in our own way and according to our own rules, to live in our own fading India. It made for an extraordinary, self-centeredness. We looked in words; we lived out our days; the world outside existed in a kind of Darkness; we enquired about nothing.<sup>3</sup>

When Naipaul went to Oxford for higher studies, his identity crisis became more intensified. Later, he started working for BBC as a news story writer for Caribbean life. In the cosmopolitan scenario of London, Naipaul felt rootless and lonely. It is this insatiable quest for his ancestors' homeland,

which forced Naipaul to visit India. V S Naipaul also recalls his early days in Trinidad. He was surrounded by multiethnic and multicultural people. Naipaul suffered by the feeling of alienation and loneliness in those multiracial inhabitants in Trinidad. At home, his parents and grandparents worshipped Hindu deities and sung the songs of Indian glory but at school he was in dilemma and conflict in the multiethnic community. Naipaul remembers:

These overseas Indian groups were mixed. They were miniature India's with Hindu and Muslims and people of different castes. They were disadvantaged, without representation, and without a political tradition. They were isolated by language and culture from the people they found themselves among; they were isolated, too, from India itself. In these special circumstances they developed something they would never have known in India: a sense of belonging to an Indian community.<sup>4</sup>

Naipaul was disillusioned and frustrated after his first visit to India in 1962. He has expressed his harsh and disappointing views about India elaboratively in his travelogue *An Area of Darkness* published in 1964. In this book, he had fiercely attacked on disdainful caste structure, extreme poverty, superstition, ill health, filth and corruption. He had found absolute difference between what he had heard and fancied of India and what he had seen and encountered actually. He had heard the songs of holy Benares and glorious India from his grandmother but when he visited India, he saw hungry and filthy children and beggars, hateful caste discrimination and open defecation everywhere. Naipaul expresses his disdain for India in his third travelogue *India: A Million Mutinies Now*:

I was born in 1932, 15 years before the independence of India. I grew up with two ideas of India. The first idea not one I wanted to go into too closely... was about the kind of country from which my ancestors had come... in colonial and Agriculture Trinidad, the Depression, there were few opportunities to rise. With this poverty around us and with this sense of the world as a kind of





prison, the India from which my ancestors had migrated to better themselves became in my imagination the most fearful place. This India was private and personal, beyond the India I read about newspapers and books. This India or this anxiety about where we had come from was like a neurosis.<sup>5</sup>

#### Conclusion :

In this way, Naipaul's frequent tours to India were but an endless search for his own identity and belongingness. His Hindu origin always kept him thirsty and curious to know the varied beliefs, rituals, worship, culture and notions. He was always attached toward the Hindu culture; its uniqueness in the world. Though he was born and brought up in Caribbean islands, in the fathom of his soul and heart was an intense desire to explore his roots in forefathers' land India. His every trip to India intensified his curiosity to know the socio-cultural, religious and political life in India and a secret comparison between India in his imagination and India in reality. He always searched his remnants and reasons to see India better or worse than Europe or Caribbean islands. The more he searched, the more he became insatiable. The image of India

in him kept constantly changing. During his first visit, he was disillusioned and heartbroken in his travelogue *An Area of Darkness* while at second visit, he became more contemplative and sensitive about India's wretched condition and wrote *India: A Wounded Civilization* but at his last visit in 1988, he was happy to see growing awareness among people against the humiliating discriminations, exploitation and injustice in his last travelogue *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. In this way, Naipaul's trilogy on India is an epoch making work and a saga of an Indian Diaspora revealing insatiable thirst for Identity and belongingness.

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