

“India” in the Eyes of Migrated Indian Nobel Laureates V. S. Naipaul and Amartya Sen

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Abstract:

The twenty-first century has changed the concept of fixed identity into multiple identities like for instance the concept of 'nativity' has been replaced by the term 'hybridity'. The forced migration that started with the slave trade in the colonial era has changed into a matter of choice of the citizens of the Globe. India does not have a history of slave trade but the Indians migrated to other continents as 'indentured labourers' who have made their mark on Glocal fronts. V. S. Naipaul, a West Indian by Birth, an Indian in his origin and a citizen of England received Nobel for his exceptional and brilliant works of fiction and non-fiction. His religious and cultural initiation as a Hindu Brahmin by birth encouraged him to visit the land of his ancestors many times. Especially his trilogy based on his three visits to India is a value judgment that provides an insight into the recesses of minds of migrated and native Indian citizens. An Area of Darkness (1964) and India: A Wounded Civilization (1977) showed his frequent visits to his ancestor's land India which is full of little love and too much malice. His visit to India in 1990 is described through India: A Million Mutinies Now that compelled him to accept the fast changing and developing scenario of modern India. His positive as well as negative impressions encoded in the trilogy about his land of origin have received highly critical acclaim all over the world. Amartya Sen, India's leading economist and the citizen of England at present, has passed his judgments on Indian psyche in his The Argumentative

Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity (2005) through essays on socio-cultural images of the nation. The book can be best described as true representation of contemporary India that made a distinct mark on the Global scene. The sixteen essays have been divided into four parts that discuss India’s social, political, historical and cultural life in the past and also the present times. The present paper is a modest attempt of understanding the socio-cultural viewpoints of these two Nobel Laureates having strong connections with the nation of their origin India. The authors want to rediscover their own nation with a new insight and perception.

Key words: Diaspora, Colonial, Post-Colonial, migration, Trilogy, Gandhian Philosophy etc.

Amartya Sen in *The Argumentative Indian*, chapter four *The Diaspora and the World: An Issue of Identity* has very effectively brought out the role of Diaspora writers in diaspora literature:

“The nature of the Indian identity is significant for those who live in India. But it is also important for the very large Indian diaspora across the world-estimated to be 20 million or more in number. They see, rightly, no contradiction between being loyal citizens of the country in which they are settled and where they are socially and politically integrated..., and still retaining a sense of affiliation and companionship with India and Indians. ... some self-respect and dignity- in the culture and traditions of their original homeland. This frequently takes the form of some kind of ‘national’ or ‘civilizational’ appreciation of being Indian in origin.” (Sen, 2005, TAI, P. 73)

The earlier phobia for migration has now changed into necessity. If we look at the reasons for cosmic migration we come across several facts like import-export through international transport, use of telephone and internet, falling birth rates in developed countries that contribute to labour shortages and skills gap, need of manpower for rapid economic expansion, people in search of suitable democracies where

human rights and religious freedoms are more likely to be respected, impact of international language English, better jobs, to improvement of qualifications and others. If we look at the large number of diaspora literatures we accept that the pen has proven mightier than the sword because revolutions have been built by the great creations of the great writers who crossed the boundaries that helped them to change their perception. The image of an individual, a community, and a nation that has been built by the writers created curiosity among the readers of all walks of life. The diaspora, the subaltern, the colonial, the post-colonial, the third and fourth world literatures, and marginalized literature are the most trodden paths of the critics and researchers. Migration, enforced or voluntary, had changed the age-old notions of identity, individuality, and nationhood. It has also broadened our perception of culture due to which we are trying to accommodate ourselves in the multicultural, cross cultural, trans-cultural, transnational and global cultural identities. Considering these authors as the bench-markers the present paper tries to gather viewpoints of the selected diaspora writers through their travelogues or research articles that speak volumes about their land of origin. The authors or their ancestors who had migrated due to economic, social or religious reasons to a foreign land had shown special inclination to the land of their forefathers. Many travellers, philosophers and researchers tried to rediscover the nation in various points of view. Here is a survey of a few well-known migration and diaspora authors who have been acknowledged with great love and admiration on international fronts. *An American Brat* by Bapsi Sidhwa, *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukharjee, *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, *Blue Boy* by Rakesh Satyal and last but not the least *Saffron Dreams* by Shaila Abdulla are some of the very well-known authors whose national identity was not questioned.

The present study tries to "rediscover India" through the selected non-fiction on India which was discovered geographically by the great Vasco De Gama. V. S. Naipaul and Amartya Sen, notable speakers, writers, critics, Nobel Laureates of twentieth century and Global intellectuals have strong bond of love for their land of origin that is India. Their value judgements in their respective books have made a mark in understanding, appreciating, and defending India for her citizens and for the foreign critics. V. S. Naipaul who is originally from India but was born and brought up in the Caribbean country Trinidad and is now a resident of England, has written a trilogy on his three visits to his ancestor's land. He is one of the authors who have shown love-hate relationship to India. His trilogy based on India includes *An Area of Darkness (1964)*, *India: A Wounded Civilization (1977)* and *India: A Million Mutinies Now (1990)*. His books are a travel record with a few encounters with the country people, some of the observations from his readings on and about India and his exposure of Indian sensibility in Trinidad through his family and Indian diaspora. Whereas Amartya Sen earned name and fame as the Indian economist on the land of the former colonizer and then tried to write with great respect, love and honour for his nation.

Amartya Sen was born and brought up in Calcutta, at present is a resident of England and has bowed his head to his motherland by writing her strength and weaknesses in his book of critical essays *An Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity (2005)*. Though there are several books written by the diaspora writers on India as a nation, the writings of these two Nobel Laureates are selected because it clearly brings out difference of opinion due to their insider-outsider relationship with the land of origin. Naipaul plays a role of an outsider whereas Sen is an insider till his youth and then the outsider for his motherland. Naipaul's criticism appears like fatherly whereas Sen appears like that of a mother

who never hurts. This paper is an attempt to study value judgments on Indian identity, sensibility and socio-cultural impressions of both the scholars.

Naipaul's trilogy on India is a masterpiece, besides being top quality literature. He has an interminable bond with India which remained for him an area of pain, for which he had great tenderness yet from which he wished to separate himself. He grew up surrounded by mementos of India 'in its artifacts India existed whole in Trinidad'. His ability to move from one character to another, one place to another and going back and forth on events never fails to grip the reader. On his first visit to India since he was awarded the Nobel Prize, Naipaul said, 'We are not here to celebrate the antiquity of literature in India, but to celebrate modern writing.' His narration gives several allusions from mythology, religion, ancient literature to modern writings from *Gita* to *Kamsutra*. However Naipaul is shocked by India's backwardness, its superstitions, caste system, poverty, illiteracy, and unhygienic conditions, and lack of concern on the part of the government officials through which he tries to portray the dark side of Indian culture.

Amartya Sen's *The Argumentative Indian* is a top quality exhaustive and brilliant research work divided into four parts namely *Voice and Heterodoxy*, *Culture and Communication*, *Politics and Protest*, and the last *Reason and Identity*. It is a microcosm of the main events of Indian history, her socio-cultural issues, her men of the millennium and a sensible critique by the scholars, critics and researchers from India and abroad. He has referred to the works from Kauntilya to Jamshetji Tata in socio-economics, to the legend Ram from the Ramayana and to the superhero Krishna from the Mahabharata to Samrat Ashoka and Chandragupt Maurya from History, Saint Kabir, Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore the to present day author Shashi Tharur from Indian literary scene and Nehru and Jinnah to Atallbihari Bajpeyee and Manmohan Singh from current Politics. The book shows

Sen's deep interest and his love towards his nation, especially his remarks on socio-economic affairs of the nation have won great critical acclaim. He tries to evaluate the nation's merits and demerits as an insider-outsider and supports his opinions with critical remarks of the eastern and western scholars and critics but he never appears anywhere pungent as Naipaul appears in his comments. On the other hand he has defended his land of origin in a very gentle way.

There are many similarities and differences in the writing of both the Nobel laureates. Considering the similarity both have a strong bond of love and a little hatred with their land of origin. Both of them have mentioned assets and drawbacks of Indian society. Naipaul's understanding of Indian sensibility is a fruit of his exposure to Indian culture in Trinidad and through books. On the other hand, Sen was born and brought up with the Indian mindset, was a student of *Shantiniketan* that shows his strong bond of love and passion for the nation. They get tempted to cite the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as prominent shapers of the Indian mind set. Both share common observations regarding marginal status of women, gender discrimination, religious extremism and religious fervor. The noticeable difference in their writing style is that Naipaul is a creative writer whereas Sen is a more of a researcher. Naipaul's narration is lucid and crispy whereas Sen writes balanced statements with a sense of responsibility and tries to avoid passing bold statements on India's socio-political canvas. Naipaul's non-fiction is a record cum research of his three visits to India whereas Sen's statement is a top quality research document that deals with India's old Dravidian culture to present day status in the Global era. Naipaul appears straight forward and satirical whereas Sen appears very sensitive and respectful in his criticism. Naipaul looks at India with western sensibility whereas Sen defends India with Indian sensibility.

Both of them evaluate Gandhian philosophy as per their own interests and knowledge. Naipaul evaluates Gandhian thought in socio-cultural point of view whereas Sen, being an economist mostly sees economic interest of the nation. Sen seems a very ardent lover of Rabindranath Tagore because he writes a whole chapter on Tagore in part two, unit five entitled *Tagore and His India*. Naipaul has mentioned some strengths and weaknesses of Gandhian philosophy but his observations are based on the book he has read on Gandhi. However he feels that Gandhiji projected himself as a preacher but people took him to be a prophet. In *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul observes that, "Nothing remains of Gandhi in India except his name and worship of his image". In spite of this Gandhi according to Naipaul failed in his mission. He says,

India undid him. He became a Mahatma. He was to be revered for what he was; his message was irrelevant. Indian nationalism grew out of Hindu revivalism, this revivalism which he so largely encouraged, made his final failure certain. He succeeded politically because he was revered; he failed because he was revered. (Naipaul, 1964, AD. P.82-84)

He criticizes Gandhian philosophy because he finds that Gandhi himself has not injected it into the minds in a right spirit. He further complains that his followers have thrown away the essence and has started practicing his "formless spirituality". He laughs at Indian politicians who deliberately forget Gandhian scheme for upliftment of poverty, untouchability and all types of disparities but on the contrary they never forget their Mahatma when they deliver their speeches. If one reads Alankrita Mahendra's dissertation on Naipaul and her findings on Gandhi then his allegations will be far from truth. She observes,

"Naipaul's assessment of Gandhi is beset with problems of interpretation. In all his arguments, Naipaul betrays a keen and sharply penetrating intellect but a restricted scholarship

with respect to Gandhi. For most of his information he relies on Gandhi’s Rise to Power, a book by Judith Brown which he has read just before writing AWC. This book furnished him with limited information on Gandhi’s life. Further, Naipaul himself has been discreetly selective about his use of extracts from Gandhi’s works, thus giving us a single faceted account of the Mahatma.” (Mahendra, 1995, M&MoNT, p.63)

Sudha Rai has received M.Lit. on her judgmental study on Naipaul’s Trilogy, in her dissertation ‘V. S Naipaul: A Study in Expatriate Sensibility’ she observes,

In an extended analysis, Naipaul reveals his fascination for the figure of Gandhi, Gandhi’s shifting position as “insider – outsider” with respect to India, and critically examines the apparent “success” of Gandhi in his country as well as his subsequent “failure” in regenerating it. Naipaul’s difficulties with Gandhi project themselves onto an ambivalent reading of Gandhi, a reading brimming with internal inconsistencies and marked by an inadequate reading of major writings by and on Gandhi. (Rai, 1982, SES, p. 49)

Eminent critics like William Darylmples have felt that Naipaul arrived in India with a pay load of prejudices and freight of complexes and found fault in everything that he saw. His misunderstanding about the country is reflected in all his three books. In all his books on India, he has continuously criticized various aspects of the country boldly.

Amartya Sen also acknowledges Mahatma Gandhi in many chapters either in comparison with Rabindranath Tagore or as a social reformer. He has critically evaluated Gandhian economic policy about spinning at home on Charkha/ spinning wheel. Sen takes side of Tagore and defends that economic sense of hand-spinning as a wide-spread activity can survive only with the help of heavy government subsidies. He has supported Rabindranath Tagore’s remark that it hardly helped Indian economy to grow. He notices the difference in their Hindu religious identity. He opines that Gandhi was a strict

assertive Hindu who held regular prayer meetings whereas Tagore was a liberal in his Hindu identity. He tries to compare both in their attitudes towards personal life. Gandhian concept of celibacy was not appreciated by Tagore. Gandhi's married life was long and comparatively happy whereas Tagore's married life was unhappy, says Sen. He finds Tagore as a platonic lover of his second wife *Kadambari*. Naipaul and Sen both hate illiteracy and poverty of the Indians which they say is the root cause of their backwardness.

Amartya Sen glorifies Tagore as an educationist and a sensitive teacher because he was the student of *Shantiniketan* for a period of time. He finds the school very unusual as he says, '...there was something remarkable about the ease with which class discussions could move from Indian traditional literature to contemporary as well as classical Western thought, and then to the culture of China or Japan or elsewhere.' He feels sad when he searches post-independent India in Tagore's educational point of view because Tagore had dreamed complete literacy of men and women who would conquer all the spheres of life after independence but on the contrary most of the women are unable to read and write even today.

Naipaul was born and brought up in the multi-cultural society like Trinidad, where he never practiced caste and religious discrimination about which he knew a little bit but when he came across many discriminatory practices with the Dalits he was so shocked that in *An Area of Darkness* he says, "In India people were tainted by caste and that was something unpleasant". Especially he criticizes on the social metamorphosis of Dalits in India. He is amused by the snobbish behavior of upper class Indians who mimic the west and sympathizes with the lower classes who imitate the high class people. Sen defends this plurality of class, castes and creed of India as her 'acceptance of plurality'. He makes a reference to the Mahabharata where `Bhar`ad`vaja asks Bhrigu, 'We all seem to be affected by desire, anger, fear, sorrow, worry,

hunger, and labour; how do we have caste differences then?’ Both take Dr. B. R. Ambedkar as a true social reformer of the downtrodden and socially backward. Both share similar opinion about India’s religious extremism that is the root cause of internal and external terrorism.

Naipaul realized that the intellectual depletion of the Indians is due to the constant invasions and conquests over the last thousand years which leaves the country paralyzed. He says after analyzing the whole situation that the crisis India faces is not only economic or political. It is the crisis of a wounded civilization which has become aware of its inadequacies and yet remains without the intellectual means to move ahead. It is also the intellectual parasitism that Indians accept willingly and turn a blind eye to its consequences. The main theme of the book ‘*India: A Wounded Civilization*’ is ‘India’s intellect is second rate and all progress is mere imitation of the West’. He says in *India: A Wounded Civilization*,

“All disciplines and skills that India now seeks to exercise are borrowed. Even the ideas Indians have of their achievements of their civilization are essentially the ideas given to them by European scholars in the nineteenth century. India by itself could not have rediscovered or assessed its past”.
(Naipaul,1977, IWC,p.116)

Thus the originality of each culture is lost in this blind imitation.

Sen on the other hand strongly defends India’s intellectual growth by showing several intellectual traits in the nation’s secular identity, ‘the tolerance of religious diversity is implicitly reflected in India’s having served as a shared home... in the chronology of history ... for Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Christians, Muslims, Parsees, Sikhs, Baha’is and others.’ All religious Granthas stand for ‘intellectual pluralism’ that develop religious, philosophical and spiritual base of the Indian

mid set. These works have guided humanity of all ages. All religious granthas have given solutions to religious extremism.

Naipaul finds the Indians who have always been in awe of the West. Therefore, knowingly or unknowingly they have been imitating the West blindly. Naipaul terms this as blind mimicry. He feels that present India, in spite of all her mimicry of the English, is a nation altogether blind to the obvious obscenities. Amartya Sen indirectly dismisses Naipaul's observation. He quotes Satyajit Ray in his essay *Heterogeneity and External Contacts* where he says that 'native culture is not a pure vision of tradition-bound society, but the heterogeneous lives and commitments of contemporary India.' Ray says that 'our culture' can draw on 'their culture' as well, as 'their culture' can draw on 'ours'. He cites an example of Ray's film *Pather Panchali* that immediately made him a front ranking film maker in spite of his depiction of local culture. He strongly supports people's interest in other cultures and different lands because according to him 'the development of civilization would have been very different had this not been the case'. The illustrations of the selected texts are innumerable. Lastly let us turn to Amartya Sen's observation about India in the present Global era,

"Celebration of Indian civilization can go hand in hand with an affirmation of India's active role in the global world. The existence of a large diaspora abroad is itself a part of India's interactive presence. Ideas as well as people have moved across India's borders over thousands of years, enriching India as well as the rest of the world. Rabindranath Tagore put the rationale well, in a letter to C. E. Andrews: 'whatever we understand and enjoy in human products instantly becomes ours, wherever they might have their origin'". (Sen, 2005, TAI, p. 86)

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