

INDIA: A WOUNDED CIVILIZATION - V. S. NAIPAUL

V. S. Naipaul, the mouthpiece of displacement and rootlessness is one of the most significant contemporary English Novelists. Of Indian descent, born in Trinidad, and educated in England, Naipaul has been placed as a rootless nomad in the cultural world, always on a voyage to find his identity. The expatriate sensibility of Naipaul haunts him throughout his fiction and other works, he becomes spokesman of emigrants.

India: A Wounded Civilization (1977), by V. S. Naipaul, is the second book of his "India" trilogy, after *An Area of Darkness*, and before *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. Naipaul came to write this book on his third visit to India, prompted by the Emergency of 1975.

In his *An Area of Darkness*, V. S. Naipaul had measured the India of 1963 against the nostalgic, imagined India from his childhood days of growing up in the Indian community of Trinidad and – rather unsurprisingly – found it much wanting. Here, in his second book on India, he attempts to take the India of 1976 on its own terms – and the result are not much better, possibly even worse.

India: A Wounded Civilization is a very different book from its predecessor which according to Naipaul's preface was mostly due to the time he was visiting the country – he was asked by several publishers to write book on India during the Emergency – the state of emergency declared by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975, suspending the constitution and for all practical purposes turning India into a dictatorship.

He found India poor, disordered, disorganized, above all devoid of all vitality. Naipaul feels angry at the present condition of India, the pride which Naipaul felt that he would have in belonging to India was not possible in the present scenario of India and at the same time the continued British presence through buildings, institutions and westernization made him angry. It was like a violation. India's simplicity, its poverty, its submissive attitude and its self-absorption irritates him.

Naipaul in fact has a love-hate relationship with India. It is his love that came out in the form of anger and distress. He could not close his eyes to the defects or weakness of India and after a gap of about 15 years, Naipaul returned to India afresh and tried to search the wounds of India's cultural degradation. He comes to the conclusion that India is a wounded civilization, defunct, dead or sick. But his attitude is post-colonial as he does not put the blame on the outsiders who came to India; India was defeated by her own weaknesses that have been ignored for centuries. His diagnosis can be noticed in this book. It has been generated from within. India cannot respond in her old way. The crisis of India is not only political or economic, but not identifying the problem.

After independence India faced many challenges. The average Indian was very little equipped to cope up with these challenges. Naipaul says, India – for the first time in the history – was starting to realize its own fragile state. The Hindu world, he says, shatters as soon as it tries to expand. He chose multiple Indian novels to make his argument and he partially succeeds in this attempt, especially when he precisely exposes Indian attitudes of worldly defeat. Naipaul says, this characteristic Indian attitude caused the death of this great civilization.

Being an ancient civilization, India should have advanced quickly. But instead it became more and more archaic. The reason, Naipaul believes, lies in the subtle effects of constant invasions for past thousand years. He says the whole creative side of India has died because of this conquering. The effects are evident in Indian paintings, cinema, music, and architecture. With each one of these art forms, Naipaul says, the tradition has been broken. He believes this creative loss has gone unnoticed for generations.

The real India remains so little known to Indians, he says. People lack the ability of social inquiry. The habits of analysis are foreign to this land. And because of this lack of observation, Indians don't have any ideas, instead they have obsessions. And these obsessive lives act like a collective amnesia blurring the past quickly. The intellectual second-rateness caused by the Indian attitudes makes India more crippled and India has so little to offer to the world. He says, the self-absorption – the retreat of Hindu mind – causes an enormous defect of vision, which further hinders the development process. Naipaul believes that, for too long Indians – as conquered people – have been intellectually parasitic on

other civilizations. He questions the contribution of the Indian scientist to the world in the past thousand years. Again, he attributes these failures to the excessive religious influences.

Naipaul attributes the lack of intellectual growth to the underdeveloped ego of Indians. The underdeveloped ego, he says, has permeated through the entire social organization. It pushes Indians away from individuality and makes them less adventurous. And as a result deprives them of possible excellence in any field of study.

With this newly given freedom if India has to survive, Naipaul believes, it needs to break away from its old patterns. The turbulence in India didn't come from invasions, but it generated from within. And India cannot afford to respond in an old way. Naipaul warns that the old Hindu retreat will make India more archaic. Naipaul believes that the borrowed institutions from the western world, like judicial system and constitution in general, will not be able to succeed because of the fundamental flaws in the civilizations. India needs institutions that are based on its own value system, and these systems need to evolve gradually towards more relevant modern world systems.

Naipaul's argument is that the claim to nationhood based upon the tradition of spiritual values, Bhakti, Karma, Obedience, has resulted in Quietism, a withdrawal into security and a retreat from the distress of life. He believes that Indian society has looked back to a past Arcadia - Paradise - a Ram-Rajya which is not possible. India is a diseased land which needs a surgical operation. Like a doctor, he brings out the wounds of India that demand for change or mutinies.